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**Persistence : a qualitative inquiry exploring factors relating to four year degree completion rates of African American males from traditionally white institutions of higher learning.**

Robert W. White  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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PERSISTENCE: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING FACTORS RELATING TO FOUR  
YEAR DEGREE COMPLETION RATES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES FROM  
TRADITIONALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

A Dissertation Presented

by

ROBERT W. WHITE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1997

School of Education



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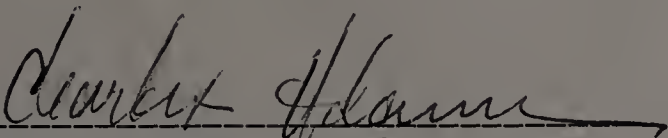
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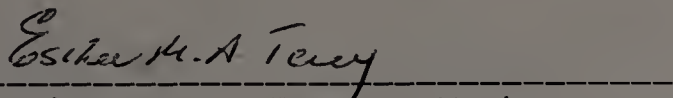
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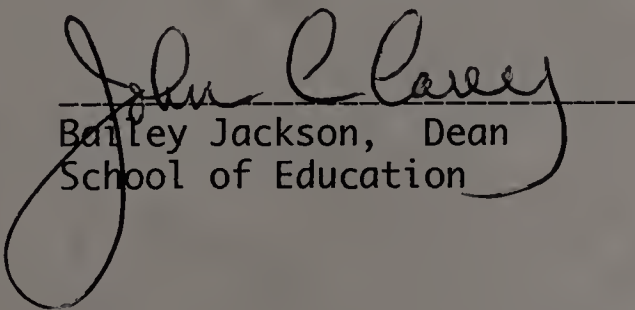
ROBERT W. WHITE

Approved as to style and content by:

  
Charles Adams, Chair

  
Patricia Crosson, Member

  
Esther M. A. Terry, Member

  
Bailey Jackson, Dean  
School of Education

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to three very special persisters:

my niece, nephew and son;

Carolyn

William

Warren

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey to this end has spanned several years. Although it has called for personal determination and persistence, there is no doubt that this accomplishment was due to the collective support and assistance of many dedicated faculty, family and friends. To all of those special people, I would like to thank you for being a part of my dream. I offer my acknowledgment of appreciation and gratitude for your confidence.

Among these are the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Charles Adams, Dr. Patricia Crosson, and Dr. Esther Terry. As Chair, Charles constantly pushed me to develop and clarify my research interest. He helped me to find the internal strength to improve by insisting on more when I felt as though I had reached my limit. Pat, who was my advisor until she assumed the duties of Provost for the University, always offered words of encouragement and displayed confidence in my ability to succeed. Esther offered inspiration and support at times when I questioned the need to continue.

Acknowledgment is due Professor John Bracey, Dr. Johnstone Campbell, Dr. Kevin Grennan, Dr. Curt Tawsky and many other members of the faculty and staff offering valuable and significant contributions.

Acknowledgment is also due those who offered so much by taking time to discuss a difficult aspect of my research, calling to check on my progress, and just being there when I needed them. Among these are Dr. Adele Anderson, Susan Costa, Dr. Raymond Jones, Dr. Hsiu-Ling Lin, and Tom Wisbey. Adele, a friend of over fifteen years, was always willing to share ideas and offer words of encouragement. Susan, a classmate, frequently checked-in to see how things were going. Tom



was always a willing listener. Ray's sense of humor was refreshing. Hsiu-Ling was always there with encouragement, support, and kind but firm words of motivation. She was indeed a true friend.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Minnie and my son Warren for their encouragement, monumental patience, understanding, and commitment to my success in this endeavor. I could not have completed this work without their love and support.

I have enjoyed every aspect of my graduate education and again, I would like to thank all of you for assisting with my journey, being there to keep me on the road leading to the successful fulfillment of this dream.

## ABSTRACT

PERSISTENCE: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING FACTORS RELATING TO FOUR  
YEAR DEGREE COMPLETION RATES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES FROM  
TRADITIONALLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

MAY 1997

ROBERT W. WHITE, B.A., MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

M.S.W., STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK BUFFALO

Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Charles S. Adams

The focus of this inquiry is on the forces that influence and underpin persistence to college degree completion as revealed through the experiences of sixteen African American male graduates of four year traditionally white colleges and universities. This descriptive, exploratory inquiry utilized a multi-method, in-depth, qualitative approach.

Because the persistence perspective invites difficult methodological choices, this inquiry met this challenge with a perspective that mirrors persistence itself. An effort was made to gain a new perspective concerning degree completion from the narratives of the experiences of African American male college graduates. The inquiry looked to their life experiences in order to identify shared factors which influenced their success. Therefore,

the choices made by this study were guided by the question: what are the basic, but essential requirements for African American male students to persist in completing a four-year college degree program on traditionally white campuses?

The data revealed the complexity of the persistence perspective with special emphasis on factors that influenced successful degree completion. Early positive experiences in the family and the community, positive self-identity, self reliance, early recognition of discouragement and harm, techniques for managing potential harm and discouragement, and building a support network were identified as factors that influenced persistence in college degree completion. Recommendations for further research and practice are offered to contribute to understanding the persistence perspective, and fertile areas for improving the persistence rates of African American males attending traditionally white colleges and universities.



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## CHAPTER I

### OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

African American male attrition in higher education has given rise to a significant body of literature detailing the "problem of retention." This literature tends to treat the deficiencies of some as though they were representative of the entire group, thus further marginalizing the population as a whole. The practice of over-generalization often results in obviating an important majority of successful African American male degree completers. The literature has in fact silenced the voices of many successful African American males regarding their experiences of higher education. This study will seek to help break the silences through qualitative inquiry grounded in personal narratives of some of these successful African American males.

The college drop-out phenomenon is not an African American college student's problem. It is occurring throughout higher education. However, this study focuses on this concern as it relates to African American males.

I will attempt to determine if college and university programs designed to assist African American males complete degree programs bring about an uneasiness amongst these young men, a feeling that something sets them apart from others. Indeed, some of them question whether such special attention resulted in harm rather than helped in their degree completion. The perceived deficiencies of African

American college dropouts will continue to appear legitimate until this uneasiness is understood. In other words, a way must be found to shift the focus from the symptoms of dropouts to the reality of their experience (Ogbu 1991).

The specific focus of this study was to explore the relationship between the success of African American male graduates of four year college degree programs at institutions in which the student body was predominantly white, and what factors may have influenced their decisions to identify, define, use and/or exclude university and community resources in persisting to degree completion.

The methodology of the study had three major related goals: The first was to identify self-reported factors which were experienced as barriers to the success of African American male college graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities. The second was to discover the conditions, programs and resources African American males self report as significant positive factors that influenced their persistence to degree completion. The third was to gain an in-depth understanding of their overall college experience, in order to determine to what extent African American males are able to make progress in the face of perceived barriers based on their perception of race based inequality. The information will come from the personal narratives of African American males who successfully completed four year college degree programs at predominantly white colleges and universities.

Although some issues and activities discussed in this study also apply to underrepresented college students generally, the main focus is on African American males. The experience of many other groups is



fraught with abuse and unequal treatment in institutions and organizations throughout the nation. It remains for studies other than this one to make their case. It is an aim of this study to initiate the practice of allowing that knowledge, previously silenced by more powerful and privileged experts, to surface.

If the experience in higher education of any group is here omitted, it is not intended to minimize that experience, nor to suggest a prioritizing of suffering and oppression. Simply, this researcher has decided to focus on the persistence experience of African American male graduates of four year college and university degree programs. I believe that many college students will benefit from this study and its recommendations for change in existing retention models. Therefore the research findings in this study are intended to offer an alternative approach to assisting African American males, and perhaps other underrepresented populations, persist to degree completion.

#### Background: African Americans' experience of the larger Society

Given the long and persistent history of oppression and race inequality experienced by African Americans, there is a need to understand the characteristics of those individuals who are successful in a cultural milieu in which researchers appear to overstate the deficiencies simply by omitting the overwhelming number of successes. The need exists to inform our understanding of those qualities possessed by individuals that succeed in overcoming the subordinate status in which they find themselves.

Given the rapid loss of much progress made by African Americans over the past half century, there exists an urgency to identify successful approaches to reverse this trend. Perhaps this study will be of some value in identifying certain enabling characteristics and behaviors employed by successful African American male graduates in order that they may serve those that are less successful.

African American under-achievement in educational pursuits is well documented at all levels (Powell, 1992 & Spivack & Amsel, Chap 2, 3 & 6). Since there are volumes of literature describing the growing disparity in college degree completion rates between this group and others, it becomes imperative that the character and quality of African Americans' resiliency is chronicled from the unique experiences of those individuals persisting to degree completion at predominantly white colleges and universities. A review of the past is essential in order to fully understand the magnitude of the problem as internalized by those individuals who persist. The need to overcome the shadow cast over the ability of this group to achieve is particularly compelling considering that academic under-achievement persists in the midst of what we perceive to be the most advanced technological resources available.

The reported failures of African American males are most evident when we examine their involvement with three of this nation's major institutions: the systems of education, labor and criminal justice. These institutions give rise to a significant literature of deficiency and failure of this group. It is recognized that education and labor will impact most of our lives on a continuing basis from day-care to retirement. However, very few groups rival African American males in

the way education and labor have failed them -- the result of which is that they are the most disproportionately represented group of clients of the criminal justice system in terms of percentage and consistency.

In varying degrees, education, labor and criminal justice institutions play an ever increasing role in the life cycle of African American males and other males of black African ancestry. The circular involvement of the three institutions can be described as follows: low educational attainment may result in low job status; low job status results in low income, in certain instances no income; low income results in unacceptable behavior; unacceptable behavior will often result in incarceration--the vicious cycle continues to repeat itself. In time, the self-generating nature of the cycle of under-achievement should disappear when appropriate interventions are in place to introduce improvements into the flow. However, progress in this area has been slow and at times non-existent. Efforts in one can not be successfully sustained and transformed into improvement in the other or to the next generation without higher learning accepting and owning its role and commitment in the development of a strategy for the problem solution.

Since 1619 African Americans have been subjected to an experience of forced subordinate social contact with whites. Nearly four centuries of slavery followed by a caste-like system (statutory assigned status) and in general the persistence of caste-like thinking on the part of many white Americans continues to persist. The continuation of these conditions in the form of race-based or structural inequality is clearly an insidious encroachment on all African Americans, and particularly as it relates to males as



evidenced in many public and private organizations. African Americans are still shackled by this country's economic experiment and the subsequent influence of nearly four hundred years of oppression.

African American males' Uneasiness with the special attention they receive may bring about behavior which increases their chances of disappointment, failure and at times, confinement. The behavior of young African American males, particularly the non-college bound may be much more problematic. Often members of this group are required to prove acceptable intentions in order to receive fair and equal treatment. Countless reports tell us that members of the white community are able to bring into question the entire group by attributing a criminal act to any individual of black African Ancestry. This was recently witnessed on the National level When Susan Smith, at the time a 22 year old white female, murdered her two children and placed black males, age 16 to 40, at risk of abuse at the hands of police and white citizens of South Carolina and the four surrounding states. No formal apology has been made nor expected from law enforcement.

My intent is not to minimize acts of violence by this group but to highlight the response as one focusing on the population rather than the undesirable behavior. Acts of self destructive behavior are as real as academic deficiency and the appropriate institutions are obligated to act. These acts, in certain instances, display a brutal victimization of other people through violent crimes. Statistically, African American males are reported as being more criminally active in violent crimes than white males. Without more information about the environment that gives rise and nurtures this behavior, we will



continue to ignore the systemic problems and choose to generalize the violent acts of a few over an entire population, with punishment generally, as the only response of choice.

Colleges and universities take pride in responding to the educational needs of African American males once they have entered the criminal justice system. Institutions of higher learning appear to be willing to offer the more than 800,000 incarcerated African American males an opportunity to earn a two or four year degree. However, these same institutions display limited interest in this group during their elementary and high school years. Perhaps the effort at the earlier stage would lead to the acquisition of skills and behavior needed to avoid prison. Although colleges and universities are simply a reflection of the larger society, or perhaps the larger society is a reflection of higher learning, post secondary institutions simply must assume a greater responsibility for the knowledge and skills their graduates take to positions of leadership and practice.

#### Description of the Problem

This study will ultimately be classified, catalogued and described as belonging to the vast body of research that is about retention in higher education; but this study does not belong there. It does not belong because it is less about the theory and practice of retention as it relates to African American males than it is about an effort to discover and express those feelings of uneasiness that underpin that theory and practice. It is my hope that this study is classified and catalogued amongst that body of policy and administrative literature available to inform those most poised in

positions to make change. The literature of retention is largely academic and specialized and, I believe, has as a primary audience, students of retention. It would, then, be reasonable for one to assume that my research is intended for that same audience, those involved in shaping higher education's response to the problem of African American attrition. While that is true, my aim is to also reach out to all of those who, for any number of reasons, number African American success in higher education as one of their concerns. As I will discuss, retention is of concern primarily because the education of African Americans is the social policy response that higher education offered to a nation concerned about race-based structural inequality.

This study resulted from conversations with classmates, friends, family and faculty members regarding an absence of information to explain the apparent lack of persistence in college degree completion for African American males. The conversations, which included discussions of retention activities as an attempt to meet certain perceived needs of these students, usually centered around support, remediation, resources, and professionalization as the dominant groups' anxieties about order, control, and indoctrination which seem to characterize the experience of African American students attending predominately white colleges and universities. The conversations were reinforced by the literature and examples of shared experiences of individuals moving through the retention programs of four-year colleges and universities.

African American students represented less than two (2) percent of the students attending public colleges and universities in 1967.

That population, although small in actual numbers, had doubled to four (4) percent in 1971. The graduation rate mirrored African Americans' presence in public colleges, accounting for four (4) percent of the college graduates. Although African Americans continue to increase their percentage of the traditional eighteen to twenty-four year old college age population, they have lost past gains in the total college enrollment. The percentage of high school graduates from this group enrolling in four year colleges dropped by 11% between 1975 and 1981. Fleming (1984) reports that the "mass entrance" of African American students on to the campuses of predominantly white colleges and universities occurred during the 1960s. Between 1973 and 1975 over two-thirds of African Americans attending college were enrolled in predominantly white institutions (Gurin and Epps 1975). A continuing decline persists to the present.

African American students attending traditionally white colleges and universities experience an attrition rate approximately three times that of white students (Allen, 1981; Cross & Astin, 1981; Suen, 1983; Thomas, 1990). Usually the general reason found in the literature is racism; specific reasons usually focus on academic deficiency, finance, social isolation and alienation (Tinto, 1987).

More often than not, the inability of a student to move through the system is recorded as the inability of the student to meet a standard. There seem to be volumes of literature focusing on deficits of African American students and the problems they encounter while attempting degree completion. Although the findings are useful in understanding why programmatic responses are developed by institutions of higher education, little insight is gained in understanding the



continued high dropout rate for all students and the increasing disparity between all other groups and African American males. The lack of research on this population concerning systemic failures, suggests a need for an alternative interpretive framework.

Given population projections for the future, it is essential that colleges and universities determine to what extent the existing retention programs will meet the needs of a changing student population. It is difficult to imagine that informed college and university administrators are not finding the projected changes for the student body sobering, if not intimidating. These projections suggest that future student enrollments are likely to be poorer, older, non-Anglo, and less prepared for college (Thomas, 1992). This problem is compounded by the dramatic decline in the number of high school graduates from all groups.

In order to maintain or expand student enrollment, creative approaches must be found. In the past, higher education relied heavily on one or more of the following when faced with a declining enrollment: (1) increase the percentage of admissions from the applicant pool; (2) recruit and enroll more students from non-traditional groups; and, (3) increase staff for existing retention programs. With the cost of recruitment soaring, particularly the cost of recruiting older and returning undergraduate students, it becomes apparent that future success for maintaining or increasing enrollment depends on improved persistence of enrolled students. Since many residential higher education institutions are unable to adequately respond to the needs of older and returning students, it is expected that every effort will be made to maintain current student levels from



a declining pool of high school graduates. This is of special importance considering the groups where student population growth is anticipated and the attendant persistence issues this group pose for colleges and universities.

Accepting a larger percentage of the college applicant pool should maintain or increase the enrollment of eighteen to twenty-four year old students. But the true benefit will be found in the increase of students from underrepresented populations. According to Porter (1990, p. 35), we should anticipate a dramatic increase in college applications from all under- represented groups, due in large part to the rapid increase in their numbers in the high school population. The increase in African American and Puerto Rican students in college admissions will pose major challenges for college retention administrators and faculty.

While African Americans and Latinos are likely to represent the major gain for predominantly white colleges, they will pose a very difficult dilemma for the retention practitioners. Historically, this is the population with the poorest record of persistence. It is well documented that members of underrepresented groups, particularly African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and American Indians, are less likely to enroll in colleges and less likely to graduate once they are enrolled (Astin, 1982; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987).

African Americans' success or failure in higher education must be considered as a matter of concern for higher education and American public policy because of historical social and economic race-based inequality. We are almost three decades past the onset of what appeared to be a national effort to correct these inequalities, yet

the problem persists. The African American community exists in crisis. Psychologically and geographically segregated, socially and economically marginalized, its young males constituted as cultural icons of evil and criminality, this community stands as an international symbol of America's failure to realize its highest social and political ideals. The national effort to eradicate race-based inequality and its manifestations has been an abject failure.

This study can be viewed as an attempt to establish a crossroads. There may be no doubt that African American students attending predominantly white colleges and universities experience an attrition rate three times higher than whites, but how can higher education approach such a fact? On the one hand, it can continue to inform our misunderstanding of its own policy failures in terms that reinforce cultural notions that certain students who aspire to complete college possess inherent or quasi-inherent deficiencies. On the other hand, it can take a long and thoughtful look at itself and its own recent history and discover the deficiencies of its own institutional decisions and how those very same decisions have contributed to the failure of its policy aims.

Not all African American males are non-completers and by casting a silence over the experience of successful African American students serves existing retention efforts that are legitimated by the necessity of lending a helping hand. Many African Americans have arrived at America's colleges and universities only to be confronted with a startling fact; predominantly white faculty, staff and uninformed students have already decided who they really are, what they really want, and what they really need in order to achieve the

goals they surely must have. In simple terms, the myths of oneness and deficiency structure that is termed the African American experience of higher education cause many African Americans to feel themselves more pulled toward failure than pushed toward success.

### Purpose of the Study

Unlike many studies of African Americans in higher education which have focused on academic, psychological, and social deficits of this group and the role of established retention programs, this study will attempt to add to that body of knowledge designed to clarify and improve our understanding of persistence and factors influencing persistence. The apparent absence of gains in understanding the lack of persistence in degree completion for this group is arguably inseparable from the traditional view in higher education theory, and the existing methodological approaches available to test theories concerning the apparent lack of persistence for African Americans.

This study aims to fill a major gap found in most studies of retention, which is the absence of an approach to college retention activities that incorporates fully, the experiences of African American males. The examination of that experience requires the development of an alternative approach to understanding college persistence within the cultural framework of this population.

The existing knowledge base is not adequate to understand or solve the problems of persistence for African American males. Retention programs will be investigated mainly to highlight the development and professionalization of the model. The idea of persistence in this study will focus on successful degree completers.



This approach is somewhat of a departure from the retention studies which stress the deficiencies of students. McNeely, a pioneer in retention research, suggested as early as 1937 that the reason for investigating retention, college degree completion within a specified time period, was one of institutional survival. Institutional self-preservation is often cited as the main reason for studying retention (Lenning, Sauer, and Beal, 1980). From the literature, I will investigate the historical utility of the retention model as a Eurocentric paradigm to gain some insight as to its relationship, value, role, and efforts to meet the needs of a changing student population.

The persistence perspective invites difficult methodological choices. This study aims to meet this challenge with a perspective that mirrors persistence itself: it reaches into the life experiences and history of people in a variety of ways; the personal stories of determination and persistence in degree completion, as told by many African American males resonate with a resolve which characterizes an experience of pain, sacrifice, and humbling humiliation; these stories depict journeys from such diverse places as the impoverished inner-city neighborhoods to prisons; while for others it begins in suburbia, taking them to traditionally white colleges and universities, where they often faced a stern and persistent challenge to their belief systems. Many African Americans' experience in higher education is that it "educates them away from themselves" (Johnson, 1974).

Is it possible that researchers can gain a new perspective concerning degree completion from the narratives of the experience of



African American students? I will look to these life experiences in order to determine whether shared factors can be discovered.

Although the idea of persistence invites difficult choices, particularly in an attempt to gain a perspective more congruent with that of the population expected to benefit from future efforts, inaction will only allow the college degree completion gap between African American males and other groups to widen. Thus, the choices made by this study have been guided by the question: what are the basic, but essential requirements for African American male students to persist in completing a four-year college degree program on traditionally white campuses? My research aims to recover suppressed meanings, often excluded from the retention literature, which should improve our understanding of the potential for a model which I will refer to as a persistence model.

Lingering questions which the literature continues to raise concerning perceived notions of inferior functioning and the lack of comparable achievement, in degree completion, by African American males will also be addressed. I will investigate those beliefs so often associated with failure and the manner in which those notions of deficiency are frequently associated with African Americans (Balester, 1993).

It has been demonstrated that African Americans have the native ability to succeed and excel in educational pursuits in the face of overwhelming adversity. No period in our history can be more telling of this fact than the educational progress made by Africans while enslaved and forbidden from seeking education. Today, we find educational attainment by an entire population that cuts across class

and social boundaries. This success, I believe, is too commonplace for debate on the capability of African Americans to achieve in degree completion, at least, in comparable numbers to the larger population.

Although the literature isn't developed in informing our understanding of the structural problems associated with degree completion for African Americans in general and African American males in particular, I will devote some attention to this issue. Structural concerns faced by African American students include such factors as perceptions of race inequality, inequality in social and economic mobility, harassment, and negative behavior and treatment from some members of the faculty, staff and student body.

A further aim is to examine the contexts of the behavior of African American males in college, and members of the environment they are placed in, in order to gain some appreciation for the complexity of persistence requirements.

To meet these study aims, two overall questions require attention: are the available resources designed to meet the needs of African American males? Second, what are the theoretical paradigmatic implications of a traditional support (retention) model?

This Study will further attempt to explore the following questions:

1. What campus factors inspired the African American male college degree completers to maintain their determination?
2. What family and/or significant other(s) factors influenced graduates to maintain determination to degree completion?
3. Which self perceptions influenced degree completion?
4. To what extent did graduates' awareness of the historical experience of African Americans in this country influence degree completion?

5. Which campus activities and organizations influenced degree completion?
6. Which perceptions of the college/university faculty and staff influence degree completion?
7. To what extent did elementary and secondary education prepare and influence degree completion?

Based on Ogbu's Theory of degree completion for African Americans (Ogbu, 1991), which is supported by a tremendous amount of recognized and emerging theory centered on knowledge, ideology, subjugated knowledge, and etc. (Opie, 1992; White & Epston, 1990; Foucault, 1980; Astin, 1982; Thomas, 1990), the following working hypotheses are put forth for examination.

1. Degree completers will have an understanding of those campus resources, and to what extent they are available, which will best meet their academic, social, and political needs.
2. Degree completers will have family or significant others that are sympathetic and willing listeners to the concerns of inhibiting conditions or individuals to degree completion, as experienced by the individual student.
3. Degree completers will have a clear sense of their history and the experience of African Americans in this country.
4. Degree completers will be able to identify, understand and avoid those campus conditions that impede their success.
5. Degree completers will know the college/university programs, classes and departments, faculty/staff, and activities to avoid.
6. Determination and desire will influence degree completion to a greater extent than preparation at the elementary and secondary level.
7. Degree completers will rely on enabling skills used in college to succeed in their work setting.

### Significance of the Study

Few studies focus on the underlying reasons for the low rate of African American male college degree completion and the impact of social mobility and race inequality on persistence. It is surprising that so little research is available contrasting persisters and non-persisters from this group, particularly in such areas as stress management, self identity and awareness and degree completion. In order to determine the extent to which race inequality influences decisions to drop out of college, relevant research from slavery until the present will be reviewed in order to provide an historical context in which to understand a discussion of persistence of African American degree completers. I believe this is important for understanding structural and personal problems experienced by African American males.

I approach this undertaking with some concern as to the most appropriate tact for discussing a subject that most of us have come to know and understand from the frame of reference of the dominant white culture. The subject matter has a long and somewhat disturbing history considering the fact that reported outcomes continue to indicate that African American males are falling behind all other groups in college degree completion. Thus, the task at hand is:

- 1) to provide the reader with sufficient information to aid in understanding that retention programs do something for students to foster greater dependency, while persistence as a model attempts to do things designed to empower students;
- 2) to provide the reader with a different frame for interpreting the information about African American college degree completers - this, I believe, is important if



we are to move away from the current knowledge and practice of retention; 3) to encourage readers, particularly retention administrators, retention staffs/professionals, and faculty to allow themselves to imagine a student centered persistence system free of social and racial interference.

A major question during this research has been how can retention practitioners best inform their understanding in order to listen to the life stories of African American college students with an unbiased awareness of the comprehensive issues of their past, present and, possibly, future? I believe that this requires, minimally, an understanding of the history of this population. Simply stated, the life stories of the students are excluded pieces of an over-arching history of the experience of African American males in this society in general and higher education specifically.

Much of the literature, in an attempt to understand the current status of African American males, revisits the factual accounts of slavery as if the recapitulation of this history would give legitimacy to the story. I believe that the life stories of African American males are the most significant history that can be told; they offer the context in which we can begin to come to know. We must recognize that any attempt to share a personal narrative is, in fact history, a part of a much larger history, and should not be viewed as representative.

The truth is that African American males are leaving colleges in alarming numbers. Well documented statistics are found in a variety of scholarly works and often summarized for the larger public by the print and visual media. African American males are in the midst of an

educational crisis. We need only look to statistics in order to inform our understanding of this fact. Having made that claim, I had a sense of uneasiness with the statistics which caused me to wonder if there was a way to give the numbers meaning, or some explanation as to how we reached this point. Without the narratives of those African American males that have survived the crisis, we will remain uninformed and continue to plan based on unsubstantiated perceptions.

Traditional history, the only record available, will be examined in order to gain some understanding of the origins of our ideology. The ideology, which has guided the practice of treatment and response toward African Americans since slavery, is important in understanding how this country could develop and maintain a system which met the test for a caste system and continues in caste-like thinking long after the removal of legal barriers to "race mixing" (Ogbu, 1991).

More important, a review of this history will allow us to gain some insight as to caste like thinking which continues to infect successful attempts at race relations. Equally important is the need to understand the role higher education played and continues to play in perpetuating social, economic, political, and educational inequality in the society. To reminisce of history is to inform our understanding of treatment of African Americans as inferior to white Americans and African Americans' persistence in attempting to obtain an education in the face of overwhelming odds.

## Definition of Terms

### African American:

Any individual self identified as being of (Black) African American ancestry, educated in the U.S. and claims to be domiciled in the U.S.

### Criminalize:

Legislation/statutes classifying specific acts or behavior as illegal and punishable.

### Persistence:

The inner-strength and ability to make progress in the face of obstacles, misfortune and difficulties. The persistent student is able to identify and avoid potential harm which may result in setbacks.

### Retention/Support Program(s):

Any program or set of practices with its principle concern aimed at countering a perceived problem of attrition among the general student population or among the members of a specific culturally differentiated group within that population.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

"can't say who I am unless you agree I'm real."

Imamu Amiri Baraka

Baraka's lines simply and eloquently express a vision of knowledge, oppression, power and truth that has tremendous implications for all of those that include themselves in that group proclaiming interest in finding a truth which brings us closer to understanding the experience of persistence of African American males attending traditionally white colleges and universities. If that truth is only found and reported by those that observe and study members of this group, we can never be sure if our desire to know and understand is based on a truth, a half truth, or any portion of truth.

Richard Wright, an African American writer, earned his living by sharing the life stories of African Americans through the voices of characters that he created. The voices told the stories that had not previously been heard. The characters that he brought to life shared something very special and, while at the same time, reshaping history by adding the voice(s) that only those individuals that have survived the experience are able to add. The lessons to be learned from those that have been silenced are many. This, of course, has a very special significance for educational institutions since they have been major contributors to the very conditions that define and shape the thinking and attitudes of this societies "Bigger Thomas".



Wright's character "Bigger", often made decisions which worked against his best interest, resulting in the ultimate tragedy. Most of Bigger's friends and other school mates were substantially unscathed by the trappings that seduced far too many Bigger Thomas's. In Wright's essay, Mr. Max told Bigger that "you are trying to believe in yourself. And every time you try to find a way to live, your own mind stands in the way. You know why that is? It is because others have said you were bad and they made you live in bad conditions."

Wright, in his essay "How Bigger was Born" made it clear that the character, "Bigger", was not to be perceived as an individual when he states that "I'd better indicate more precisely the nature of the environment that produced these men, or the reader will be left with the impression that they were essentially and organically bad." He continues by identifying two dominant factors: the character Bigger had become "estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race"; and he attempted "to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies and the mere imposing sight and sound of the daily American life." This, of course, only provides a partial answer to complex social issues; another half truth. Although a half truth, it remains the only truth available to us.

This chapter serves as a review of the literature in the following areas: subjugated knowledge, drop out culture, retention theories and models, adjustment/adaptation of African American students on traditionally white college campuses, race-based inequality and the history of race based inequality, persistence, and student development. Although this does not represent an exhaustive

review, it does include research and analysis of writers with outstanding reputations, credentials and expertise in the subject areas outlined.

### Are we looking in all the wrong Places?

Thomas (1991) suggests that due to internalized oppression, African Americans carry with them low self-esteem and self-hatred even after oppressive conditions are removed. Perhaps low self esteem is not sufficient to fully understand or explain the Bigger Thomas'. Due to the complex nature of the conditions we find ourselves in, we must examine the life stories of the oppressed and take the solutions we find, although they may only be half truths.

Perhaps African American males' realization that their best effort, whether in education or interaction with some other institution, will not improve their chances of success. This attitude may exist even though possibilities are plenty, African American males' perception of limited choices may be their reality. This reality, perhaps a half truth, can not be denied. It is that positive shift in our thinking that will allow us to make the transition from retention to persistence.

The question that must be answered is, how can researchers and others proclaiming an interest in the retention of African Americans best inform their understanding in order to listen to the life stories of these students without the biases of perceptions based on past research? I believe that this requires, minimally, an understanding of the history of this population. This, I believe, is important if we are to move away from the current knowledge and practice of retention. Simply stated, the life stories of the students are

excluded pieces of an over-arching history of the experience of African American males in this society.

The French theorist/philosopher Michael Foucault (1980) argues persuasively that knowledge and power are one, that "we are subjugated to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (p 93).

Administrators, faculty, retention practitioners and all others who are deeply concerned about the college degree completion rate for all underrepresented students in general and African American males in particular, and who are committed to the empowerment of students, must possess more than a casual awareness of this intimate power-knowledge relationship. All of those concerned or charged with the responsibility of doing something about degree completion for African American males must reflect on the extent to which we may unintentionally and, of course, well meaningfully disempower students through our role as the "expert," through the authority of special knowledge.

Foucault (1980) studied the development and institutionalization of what he referred to as "global unitary knowledges" that have, over a period of time, subjugated an entire set of knowledges and disqualified them as "beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (p. 82). In Foucault's analysis, the privileging of the methods of science and unitary knowledges have led to the subjugation of previously established scholarly knowledge of popular and indigenous knowledge located at the margins of society. These subjugated knowledges, over time, have been purged from the "legitimate domains of formal knowledge" (White & Epston, 1990, p.26).



Many examples are found with oppressed and marginalized populations whose experience have been described, defined and finally categorized by experts emerged to tell their life stories, to make known their like experiences, and to define themselves. This process allows for these groups to become empowered, thus, validating and legitimizing their own knowledges. How can this benefit those committed to the persistence of underrepresented populations? What can be done to avoid participation in oppressing those students we are attempting to help? What can be done to encourage the explosion of subjugated knowledge? How can the empowerment of marginalized student populations be best accomplished?

First, it is essential that research and practice shed the role of expert, setting aside the belief that higher education researchers and professionals are objective observers and underrepresented students are passive subjects to be described and defined.

According to Foucault (1980), "we must entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierocratize, and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (p. 83). Higher Education Researchers, administrators and retention professionals must not appropriate those whom they would try to know and understand by "colonizing" their experiences, by interpreting them from the perspective of the privileged expert (Opie 1992).



### What conditions must we Overcome?

The academic and social problems confronting African American students are often exacerbated by the attitudes and practices of educators, which often suggest a lack of sensitivity or understanding of black culture and the dynamics of male development. Courtland, in a 1991 article concluded that African American males in contemporary American society face major challenges to their development and well-being. Social and economic indicators of African American male development provide a profile of an individual whose quality of life is in serious jeopardy. Significantly, the literature in recent years has referred to these young men as an endangered species (Gibbs, 1988). From an early age, it has become increasingly apparent that Black males are confronted with a series of obstacles in their attempts to attain academic, career and personal-social success. They face formidable challenges to their educational development. Statistics on educational attainment suggests that many African American males are at-risk in the nation's schools.

According to Reed (1988):

- 1) The overall mean achievement scores for Black male students are below those of other groups in the basic subject areas.
- 2) Black males are much more likely to be placed in classes for the educable mentally retarded and for students with learning disabilities than in gifted and talented classes.
- 3) Black males are far more likely to be placed in general education and vocational high school curricular tracks than in an academic track.
- 4) Black males are suspended from school more frequently and for longer periods of time than other student groups.
- 5) Black females complete high school at higher rates than Black males.

Such data are compounded by the fact that African American males are frequently the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors, and administrators. Educators expect to encounter academic and social problems from African American males prior to meeting them, which often leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Washington & Lee, 1982).

Frustration, underachievement or ultimate failure, therefore, often comprise the contemporary educational reality for scores of African American males. It is evident that African American males from kindergarten through high school, and college for a small but fortunate few, tend to experience significant alienation in America's schools. The consequences are usually seen in major limitations on socioeconomic mobility, ultimately leading to high rates of unemployment, crime, and incarceration for massive numbers of young African American men.

African Americans have experienced a great deal of negative treatment at all levels of education, resulting in profound consequences for participation in the social, economic, and political life of the society. The process of relegating and indoctrinating these students to accept an inferior status started at the elementary level. Rubovits & Maeher (1973, p. 202) found that:

"...White teachers engaged in a pattern of expectation and interaction that resulted in Black students being given less attention, ignored more, praised less and criticized more than whites were."

They also found that gifted African American students were treated more harshly than all other students, including "nongifted" African American students. Hacker's (1992, p. 171) findings agreed with those of Rubovits & Maeher. They found that at best the talents and desires

of African American students are unrecognized and discouraged and at worse, destroyed. The destructive treatment was targeted at all forms of behavior, writing, speech, recognition, or cross-race friendships viewed as acceptable for white students but unacceptable for African American students.

A study by Michelle Fine in 1987 observed that negative valuation of language of many African American students (often referred to in the literature as "Black English") creates as much dissonance for successful as that for unsuccessful students. School is associated with white culture and thus is recognized as an instrument of social control and oppression. School does not always offer an escape from racism but rather serves to keep African American students in their place.

African American students are exposed to unsolicited and undeserved negative treatment throughout their experience of education. It is, no doubt, much more noticeable as they progress through the grades. Upon entering college the student is without family, relatives, and large numbers of African American students to assist in warding off the negative treatment at the hands of white faculty, administrators, support staff, and students.

Tinto (1987) would agree that African Americans are often exposed to a cool reception from their peers, faculty, and staff on predominantly white campuses. These eighteen and nineteen year old single adolescent students are still struggling with issues characteristic of that age group.

When students enter the university they are usually assigned housing; on occasion white and African American students are assigned



as roommates. This experience may be much more difficult for an African American male to accept than a white male. The adjustments required on the part of any two students of different backgrounds may be enormous. If the roommates are separated by caste like thinking, the pressure and ultimately adjustment is impossible (Ogbu, 1990). In the absence of caste like thinking (single race roommates) adjustment concerns will certainly exist, but they are not usually subjected to the influence of negative and insensitive actions by campus members outside of the room. Both students assumes his caste pattern, adding to the person-to-person problems, on occasions when friends visit the room, particularly when they are planning a social activity involving female and male students. African American students usually request roommates from their own group to avoid this type of social isolation and alienation.

It is not uncommon for African American students to experience various forms of confusing messages from members of the campus community on a daily basis. These messages, in their least offensive form may range from white students not fraternizing or, for that matter, speaking to them in an offensive manner. More overt forms of hatred directed at these students include race baiting and graffiti on bathroom and dormitory walls. Although, in certain instances the perpetrators may not believe themselves to be mean spirited, they manage to cause considerable harm.

Other research on preference due to difficulty African Americans experience on traditionally white college campuses is in the area of faculty, counselors and advisors. Some of the earliest research on preferences minorities expressed for faculty, counselors,



advisors, and others assisting on an individual level, indicated a preference for same race teacher/counselor/advisor, especially African Americans (Alkinson, 1983).

Although little empirical evidence indicates that the race of the teacher or counselor changes the effectiveness, those being advised and taught perceive a different race teacher or counselor as being less helpful (Lott and Ozawa, 1990). In addition, counselors who engage in different race counseling, particularly with African American males, perceive themselves as being less comfortable and less effective when working with a person of a different race (Turner and Armstrong, 1981). One key concern has been that advisor-advisee rapport may be difficult to establish because of racial in-group-out group mistrust (Jones, 1979). This concern has been leveled primarily at white faculty advisors/counselors; less consideration has been given to the possibility that minority teachers and counselors have difficulty establishing rapport with whites.

Another concern has been that white counselors and advisors are often unfamiliar with the culture of minorities (Jones, 1972; Sue and Zane, 1987). Minorities may often perceive whites as ill-prepared to advise them because of a lack of cultural understanding (Davis and Proctor, 1989). In contrast, cross-cultural and cross-racial misunderstanding has been perceived to be less often a liability for minority group members, perhaps because most minority group members have had more frequent contact with whites than most whites have had with minority people, and thus minorities have obtained sufficient knowledge about the norms and nuances of white Americans. Such prior cross-racial exposure may render cross-racial counseling experience

less anxiety-arousing for minority counselors than for white counselors (Davis, 1975).

An additional cross-racial concern is often the differences in world views or social realities of white and minority people (Ruiz, 1981; Sue, 1981). These differences in life experiences can contribute to their perceptions of the source or cause of life events (Lefcourt, 1982). These racial differences may result in a lack of agreement in identification and resolution (Sue, 1981).

So much of the literature cited above is persuasive in suggesting that existing college programs, strategies, and plans to retain African Americans in general and African American males in particular may be founded on the belief that members of this group are inherently inferior or different in their fundamental behavioral, mental or moral characteristics or capacities. What would account for such a belief may be found in the very thing that drives the desire of those that feel the need to lend a helping hand.

Two things are of critical importance. First, the *thing* that I am referring to is an ideology in the broadest sense, an all encompassing system of related beliefs and practices which always seem to "make sense" and always have the "appearance of necessity." Second, it is important to understand that this ideology or unified system of beliefs has historical origins. Only by grasping these origins, will we be able to see clearly the assumptions and beliefs which have guided a failing practice.

The dominant society interpret important ideas to suit their own interests. The idea of equality is very easily interpreted as referring to abilities in a society geared to competition. Race

superiority and slavery developed in tandem and complemented each other, as slavery needed ideological justification and race purity justified subjugation. The ideology justified slavery, and slavery validated the ideology.

Many studies, in an attempt to understand the current status of African American males, revisit the factual accounts of slavery as if the recapitulation of this history would give legitimacy to the story. Although I believe that the story of the (student) author, particularly African American males telling their life stories, is the most significant history that can be told. Recognizing that any attempt to share a personal narrative is, in fact history, a part of a much larger history, and should not be viewed as representative.

#### How was this Possible?

The ideology which has guided the practice of treatment and response to African Americans since slavery is important in understanding how this country could develop and maintain a system which met the test for a caste system and continues in caste-like thinking long after the removal of legal barriers to race mixing (Ogbu, 1991). More important, a review of this history will allow us to gain some insight as to caste-like thinking which continues to infect successful attempts at race relations. To reminisce of history is to inform our understanding of treatment of African Americans as inferior to white Americans and their persistence in trying to obtain an education in the face of overwhelming odds.

If we fail to understand the ideology which results in the claims, and no doubt a sincere belief, that African Americans are



unable to speak for themselves, we will continue to under value, if not omit, the importance of the achievements and gains of African Americans. The history of this group's experience must include an examination of the Protestant Ethic, "normative" history of Great Immigration, and the "Melting Pot" mythos contrasted with the actual experience of African Americans.

Prior to the Civil War, slavery dictated the policy toward African Americans and prescribed the norms and values, outlining unacceptable and acceptable forms of behavior. As a matter of control, slaves were forbidden to pursue any opportunity to learn to read and write. Due to this legislation, few opportunities were available to slaves for basic assistance in this area. A prohibition also existed against supplying slaves with books or papers for fear of self instruction. Many slaves, in spite of such a restrictive system, learned to read and write in "underground" schools and, in certain instances, from their masters. Additional opportunities existed in urban areas for free Blacks to establish their own schools. The success of this effort was dependent to a large extent on the attitude of the white community, who often opposed any educational opportunities for slaves or free men.

During the period 1850 to 1858 less than 25,000 African Americans out of a total population of 4 1/2 million could read or write. Although education was legally denied slaves and refused to freed African Americans, many whites interpreted the illiteracy as inferiority. The perceived inferiority of African Americans was a major justification for continued slavery.



It was clear to slaves and free men that their education was not to come from existing white institutions. They were not welcome in white educational institutions. This period marked the beginning of efforts to establish their own higher education institutions. Wilberforce College, a religious college, and Lincoln University were the only schools established in the 1850's for and by African Americans. White Northern missionaries joined this effort in the mid to late 1860's.

During the period of Reconstruction, educated and wealthy Southern whites joined in developing higher education institutions for African Americans, due in large part to their concern over any mixing of the races and the belief that this population was incapable of educational success. They disagreed with the emphasis Northern missionaries placed on a liberal arts education for this group, stressing the importance of training in such fields as mechanics, domestic services, and agriculture (Bullock, 1967). In 1868 General Armstrong, a strong advocate of separate and inferior education for African Americans, founded Hampton Institute on the belief that they were less competent than whites (Bullock, 1967). This philosophy was consistent with the prevailing attitude held by Southern whites.

The philosophy of separate accommodations for the races received the support of the government in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision. This decision paved the way for the establishment of separate facilities under the "separate but equal" doctrine (Logan, 1970). Jim Crow statutes and increased violence directed at African Americans became common-place following the Plessy decision.

Booker T. Washington added his voice to the growing number of whites pushing for lower caliber Black colleges. He argued that the development of separate institutions for Blacks and whites was the road to peace and harmony in the South (Logan, 1970). After Washington's death in 1915 African Americans in increasing numbers pushed for a liberal arts education. The black colleges established during the period 1850 to 1890 assumed the major responsibility for providing a liberal arts education. In 1930 over 19,000 students were enrolled in black colleges (Aptheker, 1973). The rate of illiteracy was reduced from 60% in 1895 to 25% in 1930.

The Black church played a significant role in providing for educational opportunities for African Americans. The leadership of churches in education continues today. In my personal experience, the role of education and the church played a tremendous part in encouraging individual success and education, in a manner consistent with the beliefs of the dominant white society. These black churches had been indoctrinated in the tradition of Western Christianity, and behaved in similar fashion to Northern white churches.

The earliest recollection I have of the historical importance placed on education and the role of the church came from my father. Education was his solution for almost all problems dealing with matters of race. This approach with his children was very much out of character with his personal life style. Although he was not formally educated, he was heavily influenced by the dominant norms of the larger society, particularly those beliefs held by Christians and interpreted to him by his father, a Methodist (AME Zion) minister.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion church has a long and rich history of providing guidance for the spiritual, educational, social, and moral needs of African Americans. The AME Zion Church, a major influence in justifying the acceptance of second class status and a position of inferiority, made it virtually impossible for African Americans to interpret success as defined by whites. The preacher, teacher, and other professions or vocations defined the status and stratification expected by the larger society. African Americans were to be trained or educated only in areas that sustained the separation of the races or supported the larger society through the service industry (house keeping, child care, etc., or those trades advocated by Booker T. Washington). This is the accommodating approach that has all but emptied the black church of African American males, especially young men. It is not surprising that the Bigger Thomas' are confused by the double messages.

The AME Zion church was a break away group from the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. In 1787 Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the Free African Society, a mutual-aid organization which experimented with nondenominational religious exercises conducted along Quaker lines (Meier, 1970).

In the late 1780's, overt discrimination in white northern and border states forced Jones and Allen to organize their separate churches. In 1794 Jones founded the first black Episcopal Church in America while Allen organized the AME Church. While serving as leader of the AME Church, Allen maintained his membership in the white Methodist Church throughout the remainder of his life.



In 1821 a group of conservative "free men" left the AME and white Methodist Church, where they held dual membership, and formed the AME Zion Church in New York. In 1864 this organization established itself in the South. The AME Zion Church continued, in the South, the practice of educating African Americans and perpetuating a continued belief in the doctrines of John Calvin and Martin Luther. They were very active in establishing schools in the North from the mid 1700s to the early 1900s for African Americans and in the South during the late 1800s to the mid 1900s for former slaves. Many criticize this denomination for its conformity and acceptance of European values.

In discussing the history of the Black experience in this country, my father would often say that "an education is the most important thing you can obtain". I believe his private view of the purpose of an education was merely to improve the earning power of his children. His encouragement was often tempered with reality, cautioning that the motives and sincerity of whites were not to be trusted. This advise, I believe, was designed to avoid against discouragement in the event the benefits of an education were not realized. This form of indoctrination was not unique to my household and it continues to this date.

My father, vulnerable to the indoctrination of religious and industrial institutions in this society, was simply suggesting that he wanted a better life for his children than he had lived. This better life was seen achievable through increased and improved education, not political activity. Many years ago George Ticknor, a professor at Harvard, expressed an American "Truism" when he observed, "There is,



at this moment, hardly a father in our country, who does not count among his chief anxieties, and most earnest hopes, the desire to give his children a better education than he has been able to obtain for himself." We expect parents to encourage their children to work hard in order to become successful.

The notion of reward being commensurate with effort has endured since the days of John Calvin and Martin Luther as a moral imperative, embedded in our belief that opportunity is available to anyone with ability, determination, and persistence to succeed. Even if we reject the notion that hard work will lead to success, I believe that most people would agree on the importance of universal access to post-secondary education. This of course perpetuates the Christian belief, the very same belief that my father and other African Americans are vulnerable to, that access to higher education will result in opportunities for self-improvement, allowing individuals to improve their lives through their own efforts and talents.

Many took pride in the progress of African Americans and black colleges, but the position of others, including DuBois, expressed a need to remove all barriers to higher education. The doctrine of "separate but equal" excluded any opportunity for a liberal arts education in an environment where the resources and quality of instruction compared with those of white institutions.

Approximately twenty three years ago the Supreme Court ruled in *Adams v. Richardson* (1973) that states had to do away with their dual system of higher education for blacks and whites. Education, as a basic social institution, has played a fundamental role in the development, growth, and preservation of American culture and society.

White Americans have traditionally regarded education as a means for self and societal improvement. Yet, it is clear from a review of history, African Americans have been systematically excluded from access to the full range of benefits derived from higher education. According to Grier and Cobbs (1968, p. 113), "education has never offered a significant solution to the black man's dilemma in America". Most functions of higher education, or for that matter education have continuously displayed limited respect to the economic, psychological, social, and cultural needs of African Americans.

An examination of the past experience of African Americans suggest that they have occupied the position of a racial caste for most of their history (Ogbu, 1978). This group was brought to America involuntarily as slaves. Following slavery they were forced into subordinate social, economic, and educational status by legal devices (Berreman, 1960). The inferior status was and continues to be reinforced by rules of affiliation and by white caste thinking (Ogbu, 1978).

According to Brennan (1967), the affiliation rule compels anyone known to be an offspring of a black-white relationship to affiliate with the African American cultural group. It is important to understand that any white individual suspected of having racially (black-white) mixed blood, was reclassified as black immediately following such a reporting (Mintz, 1991). The change in affiliation would result in loss of employment, social and economic status, and family. White caste thinking refers to whites' beliefs that African Americans are biologically, culturally, and socially inferior to whites.

Slavery and the plantation life evolved a complex, and often subtle, system of discipline and control over slaves. Treatment varied from paternalism to sadistic cruelty. Acts of disobedience were most commonly punished by floggings, imprisonment, iron and chains, or death. Indirect controls included the social stratification system of the plantation and the use of religion. Slave owners readily saw the advantages of allowing slaves to attend religious services. Some owners built chapels on their plantations, but slaves usually worshipped in white churches, seated in the balcony. These religious services emphasized obedience, rather than the impulse toward social justice, and promised salvation to those who obeyed their masters. Christianity was used to help slaves accept their position in this world (Meier, 1970).

John Ogbu writes that Myrdal (1944), An American dilemma: The Negro problem and modern democracy, based white caste like thinking on biblical doctrines. Ogbu (1991), states that, although whites will no longer openly admit to a belief in the biological inferiority of African Americans, such beliefs continue to persist. Due in large part to the persistence of these attitudes, African Americans developed a number of specific survival strategies including a collective identity and the role of client. Ogbu refers to the latter strategy as "clientship" or "Uncle Tomming." Assuming the role of client was a strategy most easily understood and accepted by whites. They assumed this as a natural tendency, responding with favors and delight to this dependent relationship.

The historical events and situations experienced by African Americans informed them that separate identity was to be permanent.



Unlike white ethnic immigrants, they would be prevented from assimilating into the mainstream. Although they rejected any notion of racial superiority and fought for justice, freedom, and equal opportunity, they recognized that their identity was to be separate from that of white America. The three major philosophical views adopted by African Americans to achieve freedom, justice and equality of opportunity were: 1) an accommodative approach as espoused by Booker T. Washington; 2) an integrationist approach as advocated by W.E.B. DuBois; and 3) a separatist strategy as urged by Marcus Garvey (Hall, 1979; Baker, 1984; Johnson, 1943).

The integrationist view gained prominence after Washington's death and continues to be the prevailing view of most African Americans. This view, according to Ogbu (1991), demands from whites greater participation in areas of increased access to jobs, education, voting, and choice of residence. Integrationist met with greater resistance, racial tension, and distrust from whites than the other strategies. This negative response from white Americans resulted in a deeper sense of collective identity from African Americans.

Reasons that are often advanced in justifying separation of African American and white college students on predominantly white college campuses are those relating to cultural differences. DuBois (1968), in describing his social experience at Harvard, stated that ". . . of course I wanted friends, but I could not seek them. . . I did not seek them and naturally they did not seek me . . . . This was partly because of my fear that color caste would interfere with our meeting and understanding." DuBois did not experience the cultural differences during his precollege years. He grew up in a small



Massachusetts town where he, the only African American in his high school, was the valedictorian.

White students often accept and interact with foreign students from cultures very different from theirs. Perhaps a distinguishing factor is that these foreign students have not been the product of a caste membership created by Americans (Ogbu, 1991).

American whites, inventors of the American caste system, have not systematically recognized it (Cox, 1948; Harris, 1964). Caste, as used in this study, is a form of proscribed status, particularly in such important activities as economic, social, and political life. More important is the idea of ascription and permanence. Therefore, white immigrants and certain voluntary minority immigrants are transformed from the culturally different foreigner to an American. This transformation, irrespective of culture, is not obtainable for African Americans they, in reality, remain in the same social status (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967).

The predominantly white college campus, a reflection of the larger society (particularly the middle class) influenced by such a caste system, embodies those elements you would expect to find in the community.

The literature provides historical information depicting a proud and courageous group of individuals rising above, what appeared to be, insurmountable odds and succeeded in reducing the illiteracy rate by 70% of an entire population (Between 4.5 and 5.0 million) within a period of 45 years. This was not a small accomplishment considering that 15 of the 45 years were during slavery, a period when it was illegal for slaves to receive an education. Black colleges were

established at alarming rates and had attracted over 19,000 students by 1890. This is only a mere glimpse of the accomplishments of this proud population. But wait, who gives a damn?

### How are these students Challenged?

Historically, education as a basic social institution has played and continue to play a significant role in the development, growth and maintenance of American culture and society. Education has been held out and subscribed to as a means for self and societal improvement by most white Americans. This tradition which has been regarded so highly by whites as a means for self and societal improvement, has systematically excluded African Americans from equal access to the full range of benefits expected from this foundational institution. "Education has never offered a significant solution to the Black man's dilemma in America". The aims of American education have never been interpreted with respect to the social, economic, and cultural needs of African Americans. To the contrary, existing governmental programs provide some evidence of an ineffectual relationship between African Americans and educational systems (Johnson, 1974, p. 251).

American education presumes color blindness and, therefore, the invisibility of black people. The dynamics of the situation require that whites give up their prejudicial attitudes and that blacks give up their identity. Once complete self-denial and self-abasement are accomplished, it is assumed that tranquillity and equality will exist. The equality concedes to basic racist assumptions (Rosser, 1970, p. 242).

American education serves as the vehicle, an efficient channeling instrument, for shaping the minds and aspirations of whites; that same system has moved against African Americans in an uglier and more insidious way. It teaches African Americans to think

they are white (McDermott, 1971, p. 43). Education as a basic social institution, has played a significant role in the growth and development of American culture and society. It is the primary instrument used to instill consciousness. According to Russell (1970, p. 44);

The educational process we are forced to undergo demands a commitment to white standards and values. It insists that we become white of mind if not white of skin, and that our commitment be to the assumptions, practices, priorities of white supremacy and white nationalism. This assumption is usually phrased as the 'struggle for equality'. This avoids the questions of equal to what. This catechism of 'equality' only addresses itself to the ever-changing specific manifestations of (African American) oppression.

An objective analysis of education is supportive of the notion that education in America has as one of its primary functions, in black and white communities, establishing the legitimacy of the values, ideals and interests of the dominant white Euro-American majority. This has meant the denigration of all other values, ideals and interests, including those of African Americans (LeMelle and LeMelle, 1969, p. 62).

Individuals in positions of power are often in positions to determine what is ultimately truth. Those without power must learn what is expected and abide by the rules as outlined by those in possession of power. As suggested by (Weis & Fine, 1993), those in higher learning (positions of power) have determined what is to be considered as "truth". Since truth must be validated, it follows that the group in power will determine how to validate and what is acceptable.

Since power carries with it elements of control, how difficult must it be for classroom faculty to exercise power over students.



Particularly control over an individual attempting to gain increased understanding, knowledge, recognition and respect as a capable student, while, at the same time, attempting to maintain self-confidence.

African Americans recognize the power relationship which exist in the classroom and display reluctance in challenging those in power, the classroom instructors. Withdrawal and nonparticipation in classroom discussions may be the only solution available to students feeling alone and insecure. African American students may not feel confident that questioning power relationships would not jeopardize their grades.

The voices of African Americans are frequently silenced by the behavior of classroom instructors. Frequently their voices are silenced for an entire semester without the instructor's attempting to encourage participation or showing any interest in the lack of participation. This apparent lack of interest serves to confirm the correctness of the students' strategy.

The voices of African American students excluded from the dialogue may have been silenced without the faculty and students realizing that they have done anything to prevent learning. Recent literature which makes the case in a persuasive manner demonstrating how African American students develop feelings of not belonging, discouragement in their attempts to participate in classroom discussions, and the need to withdraw from classroom participation, are reported by researchers such as Weis and Fine (1993).



Weis and Fine (1993 pp 122 - 124) reported, from one of their studies, the remarks an African American student sharing his classroom experiences at a historically white university:

There comes a moment in every class where we have to discuss "The Black Issue" and what's appropriate education for Black children. I tell you, I'm tired of arguing with those White people, because they won't listen. Well, I don't know if they really don't listen or if they don't believe you. It seems like if you can't quote Vygotsky or something, then you don't have any validity to speak about your own kids. Anyway, I'm not bothering with it anymore, now I'm just in it for a grade.

They reported the following comments made by an African American female:

When you're talking to White people they still want it to be their way. You can try to talk to them and give them examples, but they're so headstrong, they think they know what's best for everybody, for everybody's children. They want listen, White folks are going to do what they want to do anyway. It's really hard. They just don't listen no, they listen, but they don't hear....they don't hear me. So I just try to shut them out so I can hold my temper. You can only beat your head against a brick wall for so long before you draw blood... It's funny, but it can become a cancer, a sore. So, I shut them out. I go back to my own little cubby, my classroom, and I try to teach the way I know will work, no matter what those folk say. And when I get Black kids, I just try to undo the damage they did. I'm not going to let any man, woman, or child drive me crazy---White folks will try to do that to you if you let them. You just have to stop talking to them, that's what I do. I just keep smiling, but I won't talk to them.

Weis and Fine (p. 120) tells us that a native Alaskan woman, a student in education at the University of Alaska, stated that she was so discouraged by a white professor's remarks that she stormed into a African American professor's office and said, "Please tell those people, just don't help us anymore! I give up, I won't talk to them again!"

A final comment taken from Weis and Fine (p. 120), came from an African American woman that attended a West Coast university talking

about her experiences with special emphasis on a white instructor's lectures on issues concerning the education of African American children:

If you try to suggest that that's not quite the way it is, they get defensive, then you get defensive, then they'll start reciting research. I try to give them my experiences, to explain. They just look and nod. The more I try to explain, they just look and nod, just keep looking and nodding. They don't really hear me. Then, when it's time for class to be over, the professor tells me to come to his office to talk more. So I go. He asks for more examples of what I'm talking about, and he looks and nods while I give them. Then he says that that's just my experiences. It doesn't really apply to most Black people. It becomes futile because they think they know everything about everybody. What you have to say about your life, your children, doesn't mean anything. They don't really want to hear what you have to say. They wear blinders and earplugs. They only want to go on research they've read that other White people have written about Black people. It just doesn't make any sense to keep talking to them.

The statements and their meaning gives some understanding to how discouragement impacts African American students' participation in learning. The response to African Americans and other minorities attempting to participate in the classroom community, is enduring and practiced on many American campuses. Obviously discouragement can hinder the persistence of all students, but when a particular group (African American students) with shared un-corroborated experiences on a number of traditionally white campuses report similar experiences, an effort should be made to determine the reasons for such reported occurrences. We appear to be faced with a problem of crisis proportions endemic to institutions of higher learning. We have seen how this problem can hinder the persistence of African American students and in a limited way, speculate the damage that can be done to a college's effort to retain and support these students.

The crisis that I speak of is one of credibility, trust, and confidence in the intent of college leadership to lend a helping hand. The classroom experience can damage the credibility of those campus programs intended to help students succeed in college. Student-faculty relations, particularly for the group identified in this study, will remain a problem for the university until we can establish a dialogue and develop inservice programs to address the problem areas. Programs designed without acknowledgment from all affected individuals that a correctable problem exist, will not work. It is a spirit of cooperation and agreement to voluntary participation that is desired.

Perhaps the following comment from Weis and Fine (1993, p. 121) will offer understanding college administrators and retention officers will face in attempting a solution.

One of the tragedies in the field of education is that scenarios such as (those presented above) are enacted daily around the country. The saddest element is that the individuals that the Black and Native American... speak of in these statements are seldom aware that the dialogue *has* been silenced. Most likely the White educators believe that...they (African American and Alaskan students) did, in the end, agree with their logic. After all, they (African American and Alaskan students) stopped disagreeing, didn't they?

What may make a problem - solution difficult is the lack of awareness of White faculty and students of the existence of a problem. Since the reasons and problems associated with persistent behavior which maybe viewed as discouraging, racist, or intended to devalue contribution falls outside the scope of this study, no effort will be made to elucidate, leaving the matter for future research.

For those who are deeply concerned about retaining underrepresented students on traditionally white college campuses, an



examination of the power-knowledge relationship which may exist on their campuses should be undertaken. We must reflect on the extent to which we may unwittingly discourage students through our roles as expert and through the authority of our knowledge; while, at the same time, we must question the source, and validity of that knowledge.

### How do we locate the road to Recovery?

Richardson (1987) found that the public policy which undergirds American higher education is directed toward the ideal of equality and equity of educational opportunity. An array of institutions having significantly different missions and program emphases have been established in response to that public policy. An implicit assumption is that students who begin in an open access institution will, if successful, be able to move to other institutions providing different and more advanced opportunities. Many studies of efforts to achieve articulation between quite different institutions have been carried out over the years, but inadequate attention has been given to urban areas where the greatest challenge to the goal of equality of opportunity exists. Simply stated, more poor people, more minorities, and more immigrants live in cities where the college age population is still less than half as likely to enroll in college as their suburban counterparts.

The demographic profile of American children now entering public schools makes it clear that the problems for urban colleges and universities will grow in magnitude in the years ahead. One illuminating study documents the shift in the ethnic composition of Americans which has been caused by the fact that birthrate among



whites has decreased over the last two decades while birthrates among minorities have remained the same or increased. The white percentage of total population dropped from 87.4% in 1970 to 80.3% in 1994. Blacks now represent 12.1% of the total population and will increase their percentage in the years ahead. The fastest growing minority, however, is made up of persons of Hispanic origin - Hispanics represent 9.0% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 1995). The trend of increasing birthrate among minority groups is of special significance for the urban areas where 54.2% of all African American children in this nation live (Richardson, 1987).

According to Ogbu (1991), African American children usually express about the same academic interest as their white classmates but do not perform as well. He states that "almost all explanations point to the failure of Black socialization as the ultimate cause.

Ogbu (1978) suggests that a quality noticeably absent in African American students is seriousness and perseverance in their school performance. At the same time these students display a talent for manipulating the system. This quality is learned in their socialization but they do not learn skills that enable them to be serious and perseverant in classroom learning. The failure to learn is in part due to such factors as the effect of the job ceiling on their perception of schooling and in part in the form of status mobility or opportunities for self-improvement the caste system fosters among them. African American parents do not reward their children for school successes not perceived to improve their child's chances for employment. A college education is usually believed to represent a way for increased economic advances and improved status. This is not

the reality of many African American parents. Most noticeable, is the special emphasis white's place on helping their children with their reading and speaking performance. White's, benefactors of professional positions requiring reading and language proficiency, encourage and reward continued improvement in their child's hard work in mastery of the skill (pp 211 & 214).

In order to be successful in the academic community, you must begin early, as early as pre-natal training (Elam, 1986, p. 41). The technique for starting this process must be available to the parent(s) at the very earliest possible date in the child's life. Researchers tell us that preparing for college is progressive and developmental, requiring young people to initially desire learning and devote time to that activity. It is no secret that family background is extremely important to the initial interest in education and eventual success in persisting to college degree completion. Factors most often associated with success in education includes educational attainment of parents, stability of the household, family income, size of family, and early intervention in the child's life. It has been suggested by some writers that proper pre-natal health care is indeed not too early to start thinking and preparing the future educational persister for the journey leading to college degree completion. Having said that one is forced to wonder how is it possible for African Americans to rise above poverty, family strife, poorly educated parent(s), large families living in crowded and cramped conditions; often, multiple families in these neighborhoods share similar experiences.

The late sixties to the early seventies was a period of increased enrollment of African American students in traditionally

white colleges and universities. In the mid to late sixties a number of colleges and universities initiated special recruitment efforts and programs to increase the presence of underserved groups in general and African Americans in particular on their campuses. The impetus for this effort was due, in part, to the Civil Rights activities taking place throughout the country during this period. The efforts of national figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., until his death in 1968, and student activist groups served to motivate many institutions of higher education to establish summer programs, academic support programs, Afro-American Studies programs, and employ African American faculty and staff (Smith, 1980, p. 2).

It was also during the late sixties to the early seventies that many of these colleges developed special academic programs to meet the needs of African American students unable to qualify for regular admission (Smith, 1980, p. 6). According to Smith (1980, p. 3), the existence of special programs that provide academic and financial assistance seems to have had little impact on the attrition of African American students.

It is important to understand the social context in which the education of African American students on historically white college campuses take place. Smith's research on the campus adjustment of African American students revealed that, by and large, they feel depressed, lonely, and alienated. They perceive their universities as hostile places in which their relationships with white professors and white students are often demoralizing (1980, p. 5). Smith found that it was possible for African American students to complete a baccalaureate degree without learning anything about the contributions



of African Americans to America. Students were faced with "institutional racism" and faculty and administrative efforts to attempt make students forget about their "Blackness," a characteristics seen by many African American students as something to be cherished (p. 9). Smith states that;

white administrators and faculty expressed opinions that, in the best interests of all students, race ought to be downplayed. This divergence of views between what most African American students feel is good for their cultural/emotional development and what most white administrators and faculty feel is good for the entire university is a source of considerable confusion and tension for Black students (p. 9).

Theorists such as Erikson (1950) have suggested that major aspects of human development unfold in a series of life stages. As individuals progress through the life stages, they must achieve a series of developmental tasks. The achievement of these tasks at one stage of life influences success with tasks in succeeding stages. When considering the psycho-social development of young African American males, it is important to note that social, cultural and economic forces throughout American history have combined to prevent this group from assuming traditional roles most frequently expected of white males (Staples, 1982). The historical persistence of these forces and limited access to positions of status often resulted in significant social, economic, and educational disadvantage for African American males.

Given African Americans continuing experience of oppression, there is a need to understand the qualities possessed by those individuals who manifest successful adaptation in a larger cultural milieu which devalues their status. Progress in identifying persistence qualities will serve to improve the chances of those less



successful in achieving desirable outcomes. The persistence literature, most noticeable that body of literature focusing on African Americans, has long relied on psychological models which emphasize deficient and maladaptive behavior (Summererskill, 1962; Heilbrun, 1965).

According to Elam (1983, p. ix), African American Students face many common problems on traditionally white college campuses. Of those problems, she noted affective and cognitive domains as significant. In the affective domain, African American Students experience social isolation from the mainstream of the campus communities as well as their white classmates. "The psychological stress that often accompanies social isolation can breed apathy, frustration, and academic failure."

Elam noted that in the cognitive domain, poor performance of African American students is due to the lack of support systems that promote academic persistence.

Many white professors appear insensitive or unresponsive to their (African American students) needs. There are few Black professionals who can serve as role models or to whom they can turn for advice or assistance. Consequently, many Black students develop negative self-concepts and defeatist attitudes that often result in the lack of academic persistence and, in turn, dismissal or withdrawal from the institution.

Hardeman, in a 1976 study, found that the number one reason African American students selected a traditionally white college was that the college had a very selective recognized academic reputation. The second preference was available financial support and third, the college offered "special educational programs". Although the study did not define special educational programs, "it was not believed to infer 'remedial'" (p. 10).

Hardeman's study, found that African American students attending traditionally white colleges had an above average high school GPA. Students persisting to degree completion, experienced problems during their first and second years of college, but would often catch-up and generally surpass their white classmates in their senior year (p. 14). She described the high attrition rate of African American students as cause for alarm; since most African American students enrolled with higher than average GPA's and high aspirations, it would appear that a higher percentage of students would persist to degree completion if adequate support systems impacting the total individual were institutionalized. African Americans must empower their youth if they are to succeed in a hostile oppressive environment. Hardeman makes the case that the answer to retaining African American students in colleges and universities rests with the ingenuity of African Americans.

Courtland (1991) noted that empowerment strategies should be developmental in nature. Far too often, the only guidance young African American males receive comes after they have committed an offense against the social order. Generally the goal of such guidance is not development, but rather punishment. Concerned counselors should act in a proactive manner to help empower African American male youth to meet challenges that often lead to problems in school and beyond.

Courtland advanced the following general guidelines for the development of school- based empowerment strategies:

- 1) Empowerment strategies should provide for competent adult Black male leaders. This is important for two reasons. First, only a Black man can teach a young Black male how to be a man. By virtue of attaining adult status as Black and

male, he alone has the gender and cultural perspective to accurately address the developmental challenges facing young Black males. While Black women and individuals of both sexes from other ethnic backgrounds can play a significant role in helping to empower young Black males, it is only a Black man who can model the attitudes and behaviors of successful Black manhood.

- 2) There is a paucity of Black male educators in American schools. It is not unusual for a young Black male to go through an entire school career and have little or no interaction with a Black male teacher, counselor, or administrator. When necessary, therefore, efforts should be made to actively recruit, train, and support competent Black men who can serve as leaders or role models in empowerment interventions.

Empowerment interventions for young African American males should take into account African and African American culture and its crucial role in fostering socialization. An examination of African American culture (i.e., those attitudes, values and behaviors which have developed in homogeneous African American communities where rudimentary Afrocentric ways have been preserved in large measure), revealed that many African American males are socialized within a cultural tradition that places a high premium on group-centered cooperation (Nobles 1980; Pasteur & Toldson 1982).

Although often over looked, the severe problems minority students face in gaining inclusion in the social life of the predominantly white college campus, may have as much to do with early departure as academic performance. Social and intellectual integration and positive interaction with faculty are essential for student persistence (Allen, 1983; Loo and Rolison, 1986; Tinto, 1987).

The extent of social interaction between students and faculty is significantly and positively related to educational aspirations at either the end of the freshman year, end of the sophomore year, or end



of senior year. The degree of student-faculty social contact has a significant positive association with bachelor's degree completion and educational attainment through the doctoral degree" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 395). According to Pascarella (1985), Tinto agrees, successful social integration of minority and non-minority students may not be the same. These scholars, Pascarella and Tinto in particular, suggests that social integration among African Americans may be successfully achieved through formal forms of involvement in the campus community. If they are correct, then we must believe that formal (campus committee membership) forms of social integration is more important to these adolescents than is the case for their white classmates.

African Americans see themselves and their culture as different from other minorities; consequently their psychological orientations and perceptions of academic achievement are influenced by the belief that they will not be rewarded for academic success and discriminatory job ceilings will limit their opportunities.

Conventional explanations have been less than adequate to inform understanding of African American students' performance in higher education, from the point of view of these students; instead, their performance is evaluated from the perspectives of members of the dominant culture's expectations and understanding of their own reality or the perceptions dominant culture members have of the realities for African Americans. This, of course, has resulted in a half truth; unfortunately this half truth, as seen in many instances, posits an understanding of differences in educational performance with out the benefit of African Americans' thinking. Existing theories cannot



adequately account for differences in performance of these students, whether from the same social class as dominant group members or who are from different social classes (Gibson, 1991).

Although Chickering's (1969) theory of student development is widely acclaimed as one of the more comprehensive and insightful notions of development, it does not adequately address the process of identity development of African Americans. Perhaps Cross's model of "Black identity formation" brings us closer to understanding those attributional factors necessary for African Americans to persist in college. Of the many models included in Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991, p. 25) research on "On How College Affects Students", they stated that:

Current research and theory on college student change and development appear quite clearly to assume that the nature and process of identity development among (B)lack and other nonwhite (not of European origin) students are essentially the same as those for whites. In the two decades (1971 to 1991), however, a literature specifically addressing the characteristics of (B)lack identity and proposing models of its development has begun to emerge...of these, Cross's model has attracted more research attention than any other.

Due to the opposition and conflict between African Americans and whites, African Americans develop an oppositional cultural frame of reference. The oppositional identity develops because they perceive the treatment by whites to be collective and enduring oppression (Green, 1986). This idea is substantiated by Cross (1971, pp. 100-107) in his model of Black Identity Formation. Cross's model described five stages which African Americans pass through in the development of their black identity. The stages are: 1) Preencounter or prediscovery; 2) Encounter; 3) Immersion-Emersion; 4) Internalization; and, 5) Internationalization-Commitment.

Table 1

A Summation of Cross's Self-Identity Model

(Listed in Numerical Order Based on Cross's Progressive Levels)

Stage	Level of Awareness	Anticipated Behavior
One	Pre-encounter	<p>a person is programmed to view and think of the world as being nonBlack, antiBlack, or the opposite of Black --</p> <p>a persons world view is dominated by Euro-American determinants</p>
Two	Encounter	<p>a person experience/observe a verbal or visual event which shatters the person's existing feeling about himself and his interpretation of the condition of the African American in America--the death of Martin Luther King hurled thousands of Preencounter Blacks into a search for a deeper understanding of the Black Power movement</p> <p>encounter entails two steps: first, experiencing the encounter, and, second, beginning to reinterpret the world as a consequence of the encounter --</p>
Three	Immersion-Emersion	<p>a person immerses himself in the world of Blackness -- the person attends political meetings, joins the Muslims, goes to rapping sessions, attends seminars and art shows that focus on Blackness --</p> <p>there is a turning inward and a withdrawal from everything that is perceived as being or representing the White world --</p>
Four	Internalization	<p>some persons have their expectations frustrated and they resort to a nihilistic, hopeless, even antipeople world view, perhaps becoming more believers in the White man's 'magic' and the Black man's inferiority --</p> <p>a person may experience particularly painful perceptions and confrontations will be overwhelmed with hate for White people and fixate at the third stage --</p> <p>a person may achieve a feeling of inner security and are more satisfied with themselves -- a person may become the 'nice' Black person...and an attachment to Black things --</p> <p>the self-concept modifications do make the person very receptive to meaningful change in his world view...Black revolutionary change may only be possible <i>after</i> Black people have been exposed to a more positive perspective of themselves --</p>
Five	Internalization-Commitment	<p>person is committed to change -- the person is actively involved in trying to change his community -- values are decidedly Western -- person defines change in terms of the masses of Black people --</p> <p>should the person develop a comparative referent (non-Western and Western insights) we have the 'ideal' Black person in the political and psycho cultural view --</p>

In Cross's identity model we note that individuals at the pre encounter stage "are politically naive and are programmed to believe in the Protestant ethic." (Cross, 1971, p 100 - 101) Often, we find Blacks that are believers in the rhetoric of white's, confusing words for deeds. Often acts of degradation of Blackness, embarrassment, shame and questions of self worth and self value resulted in internal group strife amongst African Americans; particularly amongst individuals at different stages of Cross's model. Malcolm X, reported that while in prison he was embarrassed by the way Black people stuck together. Malcolm X, was recruited by the (Black) Muslims while in prison, and taught to "hate and grow consciously angry at the collective White body." It was a combination of guilt for past transgressions and his erupting Black rage that made it possible for his transformation (Cross, 1971, P. 109) and movement from a Preencounter stage to Encounter stage, and continuation of his identity development.

Cross (1971, p 106) tells us that the individual at the final Stage (stage 5 - Internalization-Commitment) of his model places emphasis on trying to change his/her community. Community change is usually defined in terms of the masses of Black people. The person at stage five also represents a "relevant" as opposed to a "token" reformer.



What guidance is available for persisters traveling the road to  
Success?

Research on the Persistence of undergraduate students shows that the college environment and the students' experience in that environment is directly related to student persistence (Tinto, 1975 & 1987; Astin, 1975 & 1991). Tinto's (1975) academic integration model and Astin's (1977) involvement model are the most commonly used models of institutional influence on student persistence. The "goodness of fit" between the institution and student is the essential component in both models. Since the largest numbers of students leave college during the first year, it is essential that the "fit" occur quickly. Tinto's research found that three of every four college dropouts leave prior to the end of the first year of the college experience. Astin's research focuses more on involvement rather than complete academic integration as suggested by Tinto. However, they both agree, whether the goal is integration or involvement, that the time frame should be within the first year of the college experience.

Tinto's (1987) research on student departure suggests that persistence is a process of movement from past types of association to membership in the social and intellectual fabric of the college. The difficulty encountered by such a transition from high school with all of the attendant lifestyle influences (culture, family, community/neighborhood, etc.), substantially increases the drop out risk factor for underrepresented students, particularly African American and Puerto Rican students. The absence of a culturally insensitive and hostile environment places the responsibility of adaptation on the entering student.



Uncertainty and self assessment may influence all first and second year college student's decision concerning the importance of a degree. It is not uncommon for young adults, as they struggle with transitioning to adulthood, to frequently shift their interest. College course selection, majors, social organizations, and the list continues, are often reevaluated two or three times during two academic semesters. This difficult search for adult identity for these adolescents is compounded by the need for social and intellectual experiences designed to assist them in identifying and preparing for careers (Tinto, 1987).

Although uncertainty is not considered to be a cause of college departure (Raimst, 1981), a few studies found that indecision, particularly around career choices, was much more common among non persisters than among persisters (Waterman and Waterman, 1972; and Bean 1982). Many professionals, particularly the more clinically oriented, would view indecisiveness as a deficit and respond to the individual student accordingly. This of course places an added burden on the entering college student with limited skills and information to problem solve around long range career/academic decisions.

The way researchers have conceptualized African American participation in education is consistent with much of the recent research on student development and attrition (Omi and Winant, 1981, p. 316). Often this literature proclaims that parental education, individual motivation, student's age, and social and economic status are important factors in determining college participation and retention (Hall, Summer 1986; 5-27). To some, such research may imply that successful college persisters will have parents that attended

college, or the student him/her-self will be of traditional college age and motivated.

Tinto's research (1993), a synthesis of previous research efforts on student attrition, posited his on theory of individual departure. His work is well respected and frequently cited by higher education researchers. The respect for his formula describing student participation and departure is not only one of the more cited models found in the literature, but he convincingly argues that student departure has more to do with the voluntary nature of leaving than failure to meet academic standards. The Scaffolding for his model can be found in Van Gennep's rituals of passage (assumed that individuals ritualistically moved through a number of life stages from childhood forward), and Durkheim's theory on suicide, anomie, and the importance of social integration (posited that suicide resulted from the individual's inability to integrate within the structures -- family, church, state, and etc. -- of society (pp. 84-137).

Essentially, Tinto advances the notion that the college experience implies passage from one stage to the next and that persistence in college depends on how successful colleges are at integrating students into the social and academic communities of the institution (Tinto, 1993, p. 119).

Given the strength of African American culture and their historical experience in the society, which is often seen as being at odds with the culture of the mainstream institutions they interact with, will African Americans be able to persist in our larger societal institutions. Should these students be prepared to physically and

socially disassociate themselves from the communities of their past?

Tinto (p. 94 & 95), commented that;

We must be careful, however, not to oversimplify what is a very complex, quite fluid situation that need not be experienced in the same fashion by every student. In speaking of the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation as we have, it should not be assumed that these stages are always as distinct and clearly sequenced as we have made them. There is no doubt, for instance, that some students are hardly aware of the transition required in becoming integrated into the life of the college. Others may not experience separation, transition, and incorporation in the same sequence or at the same or at the same time. ... the ways individuals experience these presumed stages can vary considerably. A white child of a college-educated family may look forward to and be rewarded for making the transition...

Tinto continued with the following statement; "to become fully incorporated into the life of the college, they (students) have to socially as well as physically disassociate themselves from the communities of the past. Their persistence in college depends upon their becoming departers from their former communities (p. 96)."

Several studies have relied on "the theoretical model developed by Tinto (1975) to establish successful retention programs designed to retain "minority" students attending traditionally white colleges. The model focuses on the concepts of commitment and integration as a means to explicate the process of attrition. Programs subscribing to Tinto's concepts show some limited success in the improvement of retention, or what is referred to as "persistence". The Lubin House Experience, developed by Syracuse University is such a program that experienced success as a result of the model. The study, conducted in 1980 and 1984 by the University's Offices of the Registrar and Student Data Systems, found that the Lubin program substantially improved the retention of minority students.



Ladner's research on the success of Syracuse's experiment (1989, p. 25) reported that Minority students made up approximately 12% of the 1980 entering freshmen class; however, at the end of five semesters, minority students represented only 8% of the remaining students. Of the 970 students who left after five semesters, 188 (19%) were minority. Therefore, although minority students represented 12% of the entering class, they accounted for 19% of the student population that left after five semesters. Following the establishment of the Lubin House, the 1984 five (5) semester period found that only five (5) percent of the minority student participants were no longer enrolled. The Lubin House model is usually held up as a success.

According Lomotey (1990), college campus culture is important in determining the levels of enrollment and retention of African-American students. He identified the following seven categories as being important in retaining African American students: campus climate, Black Studies, support services, admissions, retention, financial aid, and the larger community. His observations and recommendations included:

- 1) the importance of vigilance in insuring the success of African-American students;
- 2) the need for African-American students to rely on each other;
- 3) the importance of a "critical mass" of African-American students on a predominantly white campus; and,
- 4) the need to hire, reward, and retain more African-American faculty and administrators.

African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians remain less likely to graduate from college than other Americans. This national



failure undermines the foundations of a free society, interferes with efforts to build a competitive work force, and raise doubts about our educational system's capacity to respond to oncoming demographic changes. This persistent and serious problem is solvable if concerned institutions use a comprehensive approach.

Richardson (1988) offers the following principles which were supported by a three-year national study of ten predominately white colleges and universities that he states have achieved success in graduating minority students over ten or more years. The study based on Tinto's model, the study offers policy guidance for a successful persistence program. The success stories related here are from a study, undertaken by the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance and funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education.

Colleges and universities that publicly announce their goal of eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in degree achievement will make clear their firm commitment to educational opportunity. Success story include: improved participation and graduation rates for Blacks is a top priority ... (results are) publicized in the annual President's Report to the Faculty and demonstrated by appointment of affirmative action supporters to strategic posts. Annual plans and progress reports on minority student admissions, employment opportunities, and support programs are publicized by each academic unit as well.

If we could look with a fresh set of lenses on higher education, what achievements are readily recognizable that had previously gone unnoticed? What would we recognize as old with a fresh coat of paint? Peter Drucker (1993), suggests that direction and change is the responsibility of a generation unable to imagine how things were for their parents and grandparents. Perhaps, with a new lens, we could identify certain conditions in higher education that most concern us

and create desired transformations. The starting point for such an endeavor is to determine what dimensions are important enough to deserve purposeful transformation efforts. Several have been perceived as requiring change, yet it seems very doubtful whether sufficient investment exist to achieve the magnitude of change required. Prospects for more decisive action must include partnerships between colleges and secondary schools, higher education research, and movement toward multicultural campuses.

## CHAPTER III

### LOCATING THE STUDY IN THE METHODS, PROCEDURES AND TECHNIQUES OF THE METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore issues relating to persistence in college degree completion rates for African American male graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities. The experiences of the participants not only included their thoughts and actions, but their perceptions of the attitude and treatment they received from those that they came into contact with during their educational experience.

The methodology of the study had three major related goals:

- 1) the first was to identify self-reported factors which were experienced as barriers in the success of African American male college graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities.
- 2) the second was to discover the conditions, programs and resources African American males self report as significant positive factors that influenced their persistence to degree completion.
- 3) the third was to gain an in-depth understanding of their overall college experience, in order to determine to what extent African American males are able to make progress in the face of perceived barriers based on their perception of race based inequality.

This study relied on qualitative methodology because of the "depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience" which this approach is ideally suited to yield (Patton, 1990, p. 18). Volumes have been written about education, while so little is written on the subjective understanding of those that have experienced

education (Seidman, 1991, P. 4). It is difficult to come to know the in-context categories people use for a particular domain without some reliance on qualitative methodology. That, I believe, is also true here, if we are to inform our understanding of persistence, as intended by the study participants. To gain an understanding of the ways African American male degree completers handled issues relating to succeeding on predominantly white college campuses requires an understanding of the individual's experience and meaning making. It requires inductive analysis in order "that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed ... prior to data collection and analysis (Patton, p. 390).

In-depth phenomenological interviewing was used to discover how African American male degree completers made meaning of their experience of college degree completion on a traditionally white college campus. The research methods used in this study are based on in-depth interviewing (Seidman, 1985 & 1991). This approach to interviewing allowed the researcher to explore the interactions of objective reality with the individuals' meaning making.

Higher education researchers may add to the difficulty of obtaining information needed to assist African American male college students in their desire for degree completion by creating conditions and circumstances which produce anxiety, behaviors, and responses that may not be consistent with those found in a different or natural setting. It is within this context that we observe programs being planned, course decisions made, and counseling needed. We can justify any action taken on behalf of these students simply by referring to



the overwhelming amount of research, all following prescribed and proven methods in search of "truth". Researchers and program planners must guard against an unnecessarily distorted view of "truth", confounding it with their own interventions.

Attempts to understand people and their interactions with institutions present problems of staggering complexity. It is the researchers challenge to avoid distorting by looking in the wrong places at the wrong things. According to Miller (1990, p.xxxi), "persons cannot be reduced to their parts in order to be better understood. Reductionist scientific methods, so successful in human biology do not help us to comprehend the whole person." Miller continues stating that he "found less insight in theories ... than in stories and poems."

Researchers and many other higher education professionals often define themselves in ways that stress scientific competence, personal sacrifice, and high methodological standards, all of which are important. The danger comes when we begin to believe that we know more than we do or when we speak as though we have found the ultimate "truth". More rigorous research methodologies are excellent for some forms of inquiry but may limit the opportunity of what can be learned in others. Many advantages are realized from other approaches, particularly the discovery mode (e.g. grounded theory) as opposed to experimental control mode. As Palmer (1980, p.75) stated,

Behind our obsession with projecting measurable results is our need to control, and behind our need to control is our fear of what will happen if we lost control. Never will we be free of a concern for results, but we must not be slave to this concern to the extent that we are blind to other dimensions.

A primary concern of this study was to explore what significant characteristics successful African American male persisters may have in common, and how they identify, define, use and/or exclude university and community resources and their experiences in persisting to degree completion.

### Identification and selection of Participants

The study focused on African American males who are graduates of historically white colleges and universities. As I will discuss in the following pages, I interviewed a sample of 25 participants: sixteen of the 25 interviewees were selected for analysis; three (3) participants were included in my pilot study; profiles of the five most compelling of the sixteen participants are presented in chapter 4, with the remaining 11 participants (along with the five to be introduced in chapter four) included in the analysis chapter (chapter 5). Selection of the 25 participants was based on the following criteria:

1. They identified themselves as being of black African ancestry.
2. They continuously reside in the U.S. and maintain that they are Americans.
4. They have received a four-year college degree from a US, predominantly white college or university.
5. They graduated from college between 1950 and 1992.

Of the 25 participants, ten were from families where at least one parent completed a four year college degree and one completed a two year degree. Three of the five presented in chapter four are from families where at least one parent completed a four year college degree; four of the eleven presented in chapter five are from families

where at least one parent completed a four year college degree and one from a family where one parent completed a two year college degree.

Names of potential participants were initially obtained from the three participants included in the pilot study. As I contacted potential participants, I requested their assistance for additional recommendations. The participants were not acquainted with me or known to me prior to my initial telephone contact or visit. As a result of the approach I generated a list of 25 participants who conformed to the criteria outlined above. The potential participants were prioritized based on the college attended and their undergraduate major. An attempt was made to avoid interviews with several individuals from the same institution or individual with the same college major. I also included the following in my consideration:

- 1). Are they acquaintances of mine? I made a special effort not to interview anyone I was acquainted with.
- 2). Will they be available for in-depth interviews during the study period? This was an important consideration.
- 3). Finally, are they all African American males?

Following this process I made telephone contact with those individuals recommended as potential participants. I was very comfortable contacting potential interviewees and describing my research interest. This, of course, relieved the individual making the referral of any responsibility for convincing the person of the worthiness of the project. I believed that I was best suited for that task in so far as answering questions, describing the process, and explaining the next step. The potential participants that I had established contact with were asked to:

- 1) telephone perspective interviewees and determine if they were graduates of predominantly white four year colleges or universities;
- 2) ask if they graduated from college between 1950 and 1992; and,
- 3) obtain permission for me to telephone them at work or home and the appropriate day and time.

This process worked extremely well, generating a final list of Thirty-three (33) potential interviewees. I was forced to discontinue including individuals after I reached a certain point in this process, particularly when I approached my twenty-second interview and started doubting if I would realistically need such a large pool of potential interviewees. A few of the individuals that I have interviewed continued to call with additional referrals. I called all referrals, even those that I did not include in my list of potential interviewees.

All individuals that expressed interest in participating following my initial telephone contact and description of the study were told that I would call them within three (3) working days with additional information on what will be required of participants. Specifically, they were told that the follow-up would provide an opportunity for me to explain:

- 1) the various ways that data collected from them may be represented in the written study.
- 2) my duty and commitment to them in terms of confidentiality.
- 3) the purpose and importance of tape recording the entire interview.
- 4) that I will select five (5) of the participants for a second (follow-up) interview which will be more focused than the first interview.
- 5) the reason for the release form to be signed by all participants.



The three (3) part interview also allowed the potential participants to give more thought to their commitment and raise additional questions if needed.

After a second follow-up telephone call, potential participants were told that a third call would be made within five (5) working days to schedule the interview and answer any final questions. All potential participants from the list were called. Those not selected were told why.

Interview scheduling resulted in nine (9) of the twenty (25) confirming after one (1) telephone; five (5) confirmed after two (2) calls; six (6) confirmed on the fourth call; three (3) confirmed on the fifth call; and, two (2) confirmed on the ninth call. All participants were confirmed within a three week time period. Two (2) participants asked to withdraw their names from the list of participants.

Since, I did not want to exclude anyone that had been contacted for the interview it was important to determine the reason(s) for any unusual requests. The two that suggested withdrawing had canceled meetings scheduled for the purpose of the interview on previous occasions. The first suggested withdrawing after the third cancellation but agreed to continue and confirmed on the fourth call; the second considered withdrawing on three (3) separate occasions, the first after the second cancellation, the second after the fifth cancellation, the third after the seventh cancellation and he confirmed after the ninth cancellation. During my conversations with the two potential dropouts, I was told of their unavoidable problems,

entirely outside of their control, which caused difficulty in scheduling with certainty.

### Data collection Methods

The data collected for this study consisted of several different components: interviews, transcripts of informal (non-interview) discussions and my own personal journal containing my observations and reflections on my decisions as an interviewer - researcher.

For the purpose of analyzing the data collected, the study was divided into four phases: pilot study, interviews, follow-up interviews, and researcher's journal. The data from the interviews and follow-up interviews provided the information for the studies, which exposed some key issues.

### Pilot Study

In the first phase, I conducted three individual preliminary interviews in order to test the interview questions, assess responses and establish a consistent focus for the questioning prior to the interviews. Each of the three (3) intensive in-depth interviews lasted for approximately three (3) hours.

The audio-taped pilot interviews were conducted between December 17 and December 29, 1994. These audio-taped interviews were transcribed and shared with a member of my Committee with considerable experience in interviewing techniques.

A more detailed explanation and results of the pilot study is included as an appendix.

## Interviews

The participants were interviewed for two and one-half (2 & 1/2) to three (3) hours each. The audio-taped interviews were divided into three parts with each part lasting between forty-five (45) and sixty (60) minutes. The interview structure was adopted as follows:

- 1) Life story -- what inspired them to attend college. They were asked to describe their life stories prior to becoming a college student.
- 2) Contemporary experience -- What was it like for them as African American students at their predominantly white college or university. What were the details of their experience at their college.
- 3) Meaning - - What did it mean for them to be a student at a predominantly white institution. How do they see their roles as college graduates and how did their college experience help or hinder them?

The procedure was designed for the interviewees to review the significant and vital factors of their lives and their experiences as African American male college students on predominantly white college campuses. They were asked about the meaning the educational experiences had for them. The interview was carefully designed to allow participants an opportunity to tell their story without interference from the interviewer while focusing on the flow of events that led to degree completion.

The interviews proceeded gradually at the participants' own pace concerning a number of life experiences. The participants addressed many issues including the following; questions of knowledge of self, self-image, education and how one learns, real-life decision making, resolution of moral dilemmas, personal change and growth.



## Follow up Interviews

The follow-up interviews were conducted during the summer and fall of 1995 with five (5) of the twenty-five (25) participants. Participants for the follow-up interview were selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) the size of the college - two (2) were selected from colleges and universities of 10,000 or more students during participants' years as students and two (2) were selected from colleges and universities of 5,000 or fewer students during participants' period attendance.
- 2) the support for the college - two (2) were selected from public colleges and universities and two (2) from private colleges and universities.
- 3) one of the public institutions had an enrollment of 10,000 or more students during participants years as a student and one with an enrollment of 5,000 or less at the time participant attended.
- 4) one of the private institutions had an enrollment of 10,000 or more students during participants years as a student and one with an enrollment of 5,000 or less at the time participant attended.

During the follow-up interviews with five (5) of the sixteen (16) participants included in the study, questions were asked concerning the following: what is your vision for the future? what are the five most significant qualities needed and possessed by the participant to persist to degree completion? what are the five most helpful characteristics you found in your college that enabled you to persist? and, what would be the components of a race neutral campus? Some attention was given to the responses from the first interview that required additional clarification. I attempted to pose questions that were broad but understandable on many levels.



### Researcher's Journal

The journal reflected on the observations made before, during and after the interviews. Observations included the interviewees reactions to the interviewer-researcher, non verbal responses to the questions, surroundings and interviewer technique.

The journal provided excellent feedback and an opportunity to consider how to modify the questions, introduce follow-up questions, alter and modify interviewer's behavior and the surroundings. This process was extremely helpful during the Pilot Study, where the intent was to test the interview strategy and questions. Again, the journal was a source of tremendous help during the interviews when attention was given to immediate need for slight or minor adjustments and possible change in interviewer demeanor during the follow-up interviews.

Although all interviews were audio taped, field notes included all conversations with perspective participants and all contacts made in connection with identifying the potential participants. Additional notes were made on all of those events, activities, associated with the actual interviews but occurred prior to or following the audio tape recording. And those things that were not recordable such as demeanor office/conference room appearance, facial expressions, etc.

### Analysis of Data

The approach which I used for the initial data analysis resembled what is referred to as Grounded Theory (Glazier and Strauss, 1967). This allowed me to fully immerse myself in the data and

attempt to find order. Second, descriptive information was obtained from all sources. Third, field notes were reviewed. Finally, I sorted and displayed raw data and described themes found in the data.

In qualitative research, data analysis is more than a mere procedure for compiling the results of the study. Indeed, it is a process, an ongoing process of searching for meaning, updating and searching for additional or new meaning (Bogdan, 1984). Consistent with this approach, initial analysis started with the first pilot interview, and continued throughout the study as new data became available.

I made a special effort to rely on the "self referencing" process which allowed me to work with concepts that I could relate to my life experience. I also relied on a variety of theoretical perspectives for the presentation of the extended analysis in one of the following chapters. This study is guided by questions, concerns, and patterns (Patton, 1980). It is this effort which is designed to inform our understanding, sharpen insight and ultimately lead to discovery.

While I had formed a few ideas about the pattern and themes contained in the data, they were not fixed nor well formulated. The analysis was initially guided by the research questions proposed by the study. However, since qualitative research is a theory building process, the analysis was flexible enough to allow for direction provided to the study by interviewees. During the early stages of the study, it became apparent that categorization was needed and easily developed to record themes, perspectives, and issues and for that matter, other data found in the different transcribed interviews. In

evaluating the data for the validity of meaning, multiple data sources were relied on such as triangulation whenever possible, to avoid accusations that the study's findings are an artifact of a single method, data source, or researcher bias (Patton, 1980, p. 332).

I will avoid broad generalizations about the experiences of the participants, relying on my comments to serve as a framework of ideas and thoughts adding insight for future research. Phenomenological, in-depth interview as a methodology, I believe, serves that purpose best, because it allows suppressed voices to come forth and serve to potentially influence future educational research. A major function of phenomenological research is to grasp something, a phenomenon, in its essence.

Any attempt to inform our understanding of meaning or essence is not a readily discernible task; at best, the task is fraught with multiple layers and dimensions. The researcher is faced with difficult decisions and choices, not only to discover the relevant issues, but to make critical choices about the layers and dimensions to report through the crafting of narrative. The danger of under-reporting or omitting meanings and insights will always be of concern.

Phenomenological text is well suited to inform our understanding of lived experiences. That is to say, it helps to clarify what it was like for the subject to live or experience phenomena by uncovering and reporting themes or structures. In this research study, I will first present profiles of five participants. Following the profiles, I will present an of themes and patterns inclusive of the twenty (25) participants.

A research profile is somewhat like a case study in other qualitative research methodologies. It is a presentation of the experiences of the participant in the participant's words. The profile represents the participant's life experience of persistence in the pursuit and completion of a four-year college degree at institutions in which the student body was predominantly white.

In developing profiles and selecting quotes, I made an effort to preserve the words of the participants. A certain degree of editing was required which resulted in occasional departure from the desire of using verbatim what the participants said. A certain amount of editing was needed to transform participants' oral interactions into readable accurate representations of meaning through the written word (Tripp, 1983 and VanManen, 1991). Every effort was made to stay true to each participant's voice, editing only where anonymity and clarity was affected.

The profiles and quotes, I believe, are true to the participants' ways of expressing themselves. As a final check to confirm the accuracy of my representations, I asked the participants to respond to the use of materials from their interviews. I encouraged them to respond to any and all of my interpretations of their interview.

Certain themes which emerged from the in-depth interviews cut across the experiences of the participants. Although the themes which emerged formed the basis for the analysis which will be presented in Chapter 5, I was afraid that I would lose the depth of the experience. Since I, as the researcher/interviewer, had the privilege of having the whole story of each participant described to



me by the participants, in their own words, I felt that segments or "cuts" would only provide the reader with fragments of the entire story. This, I believed, would not give the reader the complete understanding of the interview, preventing any opportunity to, at least partially, experience the depth and detail of the process. In order to resolve the dilemma, I have included the profiles of five participants. The participants were selected, not only for their eloquence, and the examples they used to buttress their perceptions and feelings, but for the range of issues covered. The major themes and patterns of the collective narratives of the study participants were discussed by the participants (John A, John J, Marion, Mike, and Nick) included in the five profiles. It seemed apparent, to this researcher, that the reader would be enlighten by reading the five profiles including in the following chapter.

Table 2

High School Involvement and Performance Patterns for Sixteen  
African American Male Persisters

(Listed in alphabetical order by first name)

NAME & COLLEGE MAJOR	HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE	HIGH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP EXTRACURRICULAR	HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	GRADUATE DEGREE
Alonzo C. Urban Planning	Football, track & Soccer	No	Honor student- graduated in top 5% of class	Masters Urban Planning
Edwin P. Engineering	Soccer High school all American	No	Honor student and graduated in top 5% of class	Masters Bus. Admin. & Ph.D. in Engineering
Fred D. Bus. Admin.	No	No	Honor student	Masters Acct. & JD.
John A. Engineering	Football	Band	Honor student	Masters Engineering
John J. POL. SCI.	Track - High school all Amer.	No	Very high grades	Masters Pol. Sci.
Lacy C. History and Government	Football-track- basketball- tennis - golf - Swimming	Photographer and Band	Honor Student - graduated Cum Laude	J.D.
Marion P. Communication	Football	No	Honor Student	Masters Bus. Admin.
Mike O. Government	Football-track- basketball-rowed on the crew	School newspaper	Honor Student	Masters Journalism
Miguel A. Psychology	No	None	Average Student	J.D.
Nick M. Pol. Sci.	No	Editor-student newspaper	Slightly below average	Masters Journalism & Pol. Sci.
Norman B. Sociology	No	No	Above average	Masters
Richard S. Social Work	Basketball	No	Slightly below average	None
Ron D. Engineering	Soccer	No	Honor Student	Masters Engineering
Sean P. Pol. Sci.	Basketball	No	Honor Student	None
Steven R. Elem. Educ.	No	No	Above Average	JD.
Tony W. English	Lacrosse- Hockey	No	Above Average	None

1-high school - athlete	- 11
2-high school leadership/extracurricular activities	- 4
3-high school - honors or above average grades	- 13

Table 3

College Involvement and Performance Patterns for Sixteen  
African American Male Persisters

(Listed in alphabetical order by first name)

NAME & COLLEGE MAJOR	COLLEGE ATHLETE	COLLEGE LEADERSHIP/ EXTRA-CURRICULAR	COLLEGE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	GRADUATE DEGREE
Alonzo C. Urban Planning	No	No	National Honor Society and graduated in the top 15% of class	Masters Urban Planning
Edwin P. Engineering	No	Various student positions	National Honor Society and graduated in the top 5% of class	Masters Bus. Admin. & Ph.D. in Engineering
Fred D. Bus. Admin.	No	Various student positions	Honor student	Masters Acct. & JD.
John A. Engineering	Football	Student representative	Avg. student	Masters Engineering
John J. POL. SCI.	No	President of the student body	Very good grades	Masters Pol. Sci.
Lacy C. History and Government	Track	Photographer-editor of newspaper-editor-in- chief of the yearbook	National Honor student-graduated in top 10 % of his class	J D.
Marion P. Communication	Wrestling	Various student positions	Honor Student	Masters Bus. Admin.
Mike O. Government	No	School newspaper reporter and radio DJ	Honor Student	Masters Journalism
Miguel A. Psychology	No	Student representative	Average Student	J.D.
Nick M. Pol. Sci.	No	Editor of student newspaper	Above average	Masters Journalism & Pol. Sci.
Norman B. Sociology	No	Various student groups	Above average	Masters
Richard S. Social Work	No	Various student positions	average	None
Ron D. Engineering	No	President of the Black student Engineering Society	National Honor Society	Masters Engineering
Sean P. Pol. Sci.	Basket- ball	None	Average	None
Steven R. Elem. Educ.	No	International Club	Above Average	JD.
Tony W. English	No	None	Average	None

1-college athlete	- 4
2-college leadership/extracurricular activities	- 13
3-college honors or above average grades	- 11
4-advanced degrees earned	- total - 13

## C H A P T E R    I V

### RESEARCH PROFILES

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce five African American male degree completers. There will be no attempt to interpret and analyze for the reader, instead the reader is encouraged to engage the words of the participants and come to understand the narratives in the context of the participants' own experiences. I believe that the more we come to know and understand about the experiences of African American male degree completers, the more we can structure positive supportive experiences which will have the greatest potential for success. Until we come to understand the experiences of these persisters, we risk continuing the practice of developing academic, social and other retention programs on the erroneous assumption of sameness.

The benefit of a new paradigmatic approach should inform our understanding and strengthen the practice approach in working with African American male persisters and non-persisters. Since all successful students must rely on at least a limited combination of services, usually referred to as retention services, practitioners must understand that profiles based on research suggesting a generalized collective, rather than individual, response will only exacerbate the problem- resulting in increased misunderstanding between practitioners and African American males.



The research data presented in this chapter will focus on the individual stories of the participants, presented in a form as near verbatim as practicality permits. It is a practice Seidman (1991) refers to as "profiles." The most common use of phenomenological text is to focus on lived experiences. It is implied in phenomenological philosophy that the stories individuals recall in relation to the phenomena have a validity of their own. It is a "reality" which we should attempt to understand. While chapter five will focus more on particular themes, this chapter takes a more of an holistic concern for the experiences of five participants persisting to degree completion at institutions in which the student body was predominantly white. Each of the profiles presented here was constructed from sixty plus pages of individual transcripts. The profiles have been condensed in order that they accurately represent the participants' life experiences.

The five profiles chosen, I believe, are among the richest and the most compelling. Although the five individuals' stories were compelling, I also felt that they would provide the reader with a representative sample of all of the participants included in this study. They captured in their words, words which were powerful and embraced the themes of all of the study participants, the passion, enthusiasm, and awareness described by Cross (1971, p. 106).

Although Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, p. 35) note that Cross's model is the most widely referred to and used in "Black" identity development research, the literature reports a certain amount of blurring in the progression from Cross's level four to level five. I found the model to give meaning and validity to the words of the

participants; I believe that is best understood by the reader if given an opportunity to see the process unfold. That process is supported most effectively by allowing the narratives of the participants to communicate the message (Seidman, 1991), that will be done.

What the profiles so clearly capture and describe in an organized and powerful way, reflective of all study participants' transcripts were: 1) an early exposure/consciousness of being black; 2) the awareness of the need to find people to help them negotiate successfully through institutions; 3) honesty and openness with self, also about the overwhelmingly adverse/negative experience with whites that much of it was; 4) strong family, influential friends/significant others' support and pressure to success; the presence of key, influential helping and motivating adult supports, role models, and mentors; 5) family inoculation against prejudicial adversity; 6) often, significant academic challenge and rigor in some experience prior to college; 7) to the consciousness of need for a "map" to travel or rediscover the road to success; and, 8) surprise, disappointment and some sense that "retention" programs were parasitic rather than helpful. Chapter five will consist of an analysis of the combined narratives of the study participants.

Finally, the structure of the profiles will flow as follows: each profile is preceded by an italicized introduction of the participant; parenthesis inserted within the profile are added as this researcher's voice to explain a point or describe a non-verbal communication (such as, "JA laughs"). At the end of the chapter, a few comments will follow the profiles.

### Profile of John A.

The profile is of an industrial engineer who grew up in the Northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from Lafayette College. He was raised in a two parent family household with his older brother and two older sisters. John, now in his mid 30s, is single and resides in the Northeast.

I was the youngest of five children, so I had the benefit, I call it a benefit, of having older siblings who had already been through things, been through life and were willing to share a lot. I came from, although it is a bit of a stretch I guess, a middle class family (JA laughs). I had two hard working parents, at least when I was born and my sisters had to help out with me, they spent a lot of their free time with me. My parents, when I was born my dad was 42 and my mother was 38, so they were well beyond --- up in years and I was kind of an afterthought. My sisters and my brother are much older than me, in fact I have a niece older than I am. So when I talk about this experience with my siblings it was pretty relevant because they were much older than me. They were in high school and going into careers, so they had a lot to share. It was also a very nurturing environment. I had very good parents, and I praise God for having them because they were very important in building the confidence in me needed to believe in myself in the sense that they recognized my accomplishments and they built on those. I didn't always do things that made them happy and they corrected me for those, but they were really good about recognizing my achievements, and that included school.



As far back as I can remember, actually before kindergarten --- I can't believe I remember this, but my sister, my second oldest sister who was just twelve years older than me, would read to me, and you know, do different learning things with me. All the things they tell parents to do today with their children, she did them with me; and, perhaps, to a much larger extent than parents can do, a child has all day to do what they enjoy doing, and to my sister I was simply a live doll that she cared for. I remember the two of us reading and writing together. How well do I remember those activities. I remember these activities all through my early years with my sisters, particularly the reading and writing long before I entered kindergarten.

My brother was the oldest and at some point had moved out of the house, so my interaction with him and my older sister was somewhat limited. My two younger sisters who were again, much older than I, devoted a lot of time to teaching me to read and write. When they went out somewhere I often tagged along, and I believe this helped me at a very young age to just learn about life in general, a lot of times just by being in different places and situations with my sisters and brother before he left the house.

My parents believed in education and in their own way, I believe, gently guided us toward college. My two younger sisters were good students and one became a registered nurse, and the other an attorney. Between those two, I had excellent role models in terms of education. My older brother and sister were not particularly that interested in academics for a variety of reasons I suppose. So they, I guess, weren't particularly good role models in terms of pursuing a



college degree, but they encouraged me. Their lives took a certain path slightly different than that for me and my two younger sisters. My oldest sister, you know, was with child at sixteen so her life totally changed from that prospective of education to one of child rearing. My older brother was just in a different world all together. Although they didn't pursue academics very rigorously, they always encouraged the three of us to the point of realizing that they were making up for their perceived shortcomings by living out the educational experience through the three younger children --- it was as though they were saying "we messed it up, but you can do better", it was that type of thing. I cannot stress this point enough, that my parents, as I think back, created an atmosphere in our home which said that academics is important, and if you are going to succeed, you will have to get serious about school, and this is how you do it!

I had examples all around me, including my father, who was a person who went in the service (military service) and moved from the south with, you know, many of our folks who came north, you know, during that migration period, years ago. After the service he worked his butt off to get through school at night, while working different jobs. I guess I took from him that hard work ethic, the belief that you got to do it and you know, I did it the hard way (JA laughs) just like my dad but he had no choice. Without the responsibilities that my dad had I should have done it a lot easier.

My dad got married early and went off to war, came back to an environment that he did not want his family to be exposed to, meaning there were many racial issues he had to deal with---he felt as though the race problems in the north were not as intense as they were in the

south. Aahh, they weren't rich by no means. He was a bright man and knew that he had to get an education. He did it, he did it the hard way, raising a family of five while going to school at night. You know, he found a way to do it and that was something that always impressed me. He was always a good dutiful father and parent in that he went to work, worked those long hours and always served as a good role model in that regard as well. He was someone that was responsible, didn't shirk his responsibilities as a parent. I learned from all of that if he could do it with all that stuff on his shoulders, certainly I could probably do it with a lot less responsibility. Ahmm, so that was something I always stuck to.

My mother did not complete college, she graduated high school. It is interesting, although she didn't go to college, she might have been the single greatest influence on me because she always suggested or perhaps displayed an attitude that going to college was something she always wanted to do. But like my oldest sister, she began life early. She had her first child at age sixteen, moved north with my father and you know, she became an adult real quick. Along the way, I guess she lost that opportunity to go to college. She always impressed upon me the fact that do this when you're young, avoid some of the pitfalls that are out there. In her quiet way she just encouraged me to just strive for the very best and do it now.

I suggested earlier that I was from a working middle class or aspiring working middle class neighborhood. Early in my life we weren't rich but we weren't particularly poverty stricken either you know, with two hard working parents, we managed. Through second grade we lived in a predominantly white neighborhood. My family lived in

Astoria, which was a Black area where they lived before I was born. During the early years of my life we lived in Woodside, New York which is a predominately white neighborhood. It was a neighborhood of predominantly Jewish folks much like what I would see down the road when I go to college, in terms of the type of learning environment, the type of schools, the type of issues that a Black person has to deal with. In my grade school classes, where we as Blacks were one or two or even, maybe, three out of the entire class --- you know, only three Black students out of an entire class. But nonetheless, in that environment, the school that I attended, which was predominantly white, encouraged academic excellence. I don't remember any discouragement from the teachers, I don't recall anything like "you'll never be a doctor or you'll never be a lawyer" being said to any of the students, not even the two or three Black students. However I do remember my parents always being active in the school.

The school that I went to held parent nights; you know, my parents would come in after working all day and make sure that they were there talking to my teachers. My teachers would tell them the good and tell them the areas where I needed to improve. My parents would always make a point to talk to me about it. It was as though parents had this bond that allowed them to share with each other. During the day, if there was a special PTA type event, like a science fair, they would find a way to get there, at least one of them would be there. That always made me feel good and when I knew they were coming I would work just that much harder to make sure I looked good. You know (JA laughs), if I was doing my science project, I wanted my project to be the best science project so that my teacher would go and



tell my parents how good it was. So they were very active with my education at that early age. Looking back, maybe they recognized that I was in that type of environment, a very competitive environment, they really made a great deal of sacrifice and effort to let me know that they were interested in my schooling and how I was getting along in that type of environment.

It was the type of environment that was predominately white and as kids, you know, kids can be pretty cruel at that age. I guess when I think of it I just remember happy thoughts. So some of that stuff, things being said, you know "blackie" this and "blackie" that you know, that kind of thing, kids say that kind of stuff. But I can't seem to remember it scaring me, at least on a conscious level. Although my parents never pointed out any special racial concerns, they seemed very aware that I was in that type of environment and I think they took extra effort to make sure that I was comfortable, that I was mentally prepared for that type of environment. Now that I know what they were doing, I realize that their constant admonishments of "don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it, you're as good or better than anybody in that class, be proud of who you are, be proud of your color" was essential for my survival. It was almost as though they knew that I would be getting some sort of feedback that would be negative and they would always load me up with this encouraging message throughout my younger years. And that, as I believe with most Blacks, would come in handy throughout my life. I guess we are all taught from an early age that you cannot trust whites to do the right thing and it is important for our survival, at least it was true for my survival and my friends say the same thing.



Every experience that I can recall with my teachers during those early years was extremely positive. Maybe it was in part because I was extremely, at least perceived to be extremely bright in grade school. I was at the top of the class so I mean, there was no reason for me to be, you know biased in a negative way by teachers or treated adversely. I was always treated as the star of the class since I was getting straight A's, getting great report cards, and outstanding comments on my papers and report cards. When my parents would come in the teachers would just gush over me and I think I fed off that. I had found a way to get, you know, some positive reinforcement and that really encouraged me to keep it up so to speak. Because school was really easy, I was having fun back then. I think that the ease of obtaining good grades can be traced back to my sisters preparing me. It seemed as though when I got there I knew everything they were talking about. So it seemed pretty easy to me to get A's, I was just having fun but to teachers I was, you know, like a wonder kid or something. I picked up things very quickly and I guess now looking at it from a more realistic perspective, they probably were very surprised to see a Black student doing that well. I sense that back then some of my Black friends weren't doing as well but I was by far always at the top of the class, so I believe that teachers were really happy with that, they were thrilled and I never sensed anything negative from that, perhaps they could dismiss my success as an anomaly (JA laughs). I am just assuming that they were surprised that a Black could do that well. In fairness to the teachers there was nothing to indicate that the teachers praise was disingenuous.

Whenever I interacted with those teachers, it was a good relationship, I was always the one the teachers held out for the other students to be like.

I had a number of friends at that age, I didn't know racial barriers, at least I don't think so. Only a handful of Black students attended the school, but we were friends, of course we kind of gravitated toward each other, I think for self protection. I had other friends of all colors. I think my best friend, I mean back then in grade school, was a male. It was a male who also lived in the high rise apartments, he was a white guy. I would go over to his house and stay over weekends and he would do the same. We had a very close relationship but again, at that age color doesn't matter I guess. We were just pals, we did everything together you know, we did many things together.

When I left the third grade my family moved to Jamaica, New York, Cambria Heights Queens --- Cambria Heights is a subsection of Jamaica Queens that was clearly a predominately Black area. As my parents started doing a little better, they bought a little house and it was very exciting to go from a high rise to a house with a little, you know, a little plot of grass and stuff, I mean that was something. But the school system was a little different because it was obviously predominately Black, so that was kind of neat, that was great to be around my people, I felt good about that. Also it was an environment where it was more Afro-Centric, meaning we had Black History Month, we were always learning about great Black people, and it really developed a great amount of pride. I don't know if it was the best educational system, it was a public school, but the thing that I remember was that

it instilled a lot of pride in who I was as a Black person. It was at that time that I realized, once I started going to that school, what I was missing at the other school. Although the other school, I think, was maybe better technically in terms of preparing you for those standardized exams and all that, this school prepared you for being a person and understanding who you are as a Black person and the type of challenges people before you faced. It created a new sense of pride and awareness, a different kind of learning experience that I believe helped to make me a success.

The ethnic composition of the teachers at the Jamaica, Cambria Heights school definitely reflected the student population. My first school had almost exclusively all white teachers, maybe one or two Black teachers sprinkled in here and there. There were no Black teachers or, for that matter, any other minorities, it was pretty much all white. The Cambria Heights school was almost all Black. As I recall there were maybe just two or three white teachers. Even those white teachers were not your typical white teachers, I would say they took a special interest in the Black students. It was just a different learning environment all together. The student composition around twenty Black students and maybe one white or two white students in a class. Maybe one or two Hispanic students in each class, you know it was definitely predominately Black.

I guess at that point, the point when I moved to the Cambria Heights school, my parents school involvement, maybe, was not as great. It seemed like they didn't feel they needed to be there every single time. It was almost like they felt I was in good hands;



that I was in the hands of people that would look out for my interest, where before (at the predominantly white school) I really sensed that they felt they needed to be there to make sure I was going to be well educated and treated properly; that I was in an environment that was nurturing and that now I had some teachers who were really interested in my education. I don't know why I believed that, it was just my vibes. I just feel that something I picked up from observing their behavior. I do think that some of it had to do with their feeling relaxation and comfort had to do with the fact that the teachers were predominately Black, and I guess because they had met many of the teachers. They were involved with the school in a much more substantive way, I mean my mother was a den mother for the Cub Scouts. So they knew many of the teachers personally and they also knew the kids and their parents. You know, in our neighborhood we had our little block clubs and all the kids went to the same school. When I moved there, many of the kids, almost all of the kids were in my age bracket, so a lot of us went to school together and were in the same grade. My next door neighbor was my best friend. Through interacting with that community, they got the sense that this was a good school for their children.

The teachers at the Cambria Heights school were very much, they were very enthusiastic when looking back. They all seemed like they loved what they were doing, I don't hear much of that today. But back then they seemed like they were so interested in what they were doing, they seemed like they all took a special interest in the students. Maybe back then the classes were smaller, I don't know, but it seemed like you were really closer to your teachers and if there was a



problem they picked up the phone and talked to your parent directly. It was just a, ah I don't know, it was just a very close intimate or maybe a nurturing relationship we had with the teachers back then. But that was a critical age, during our developmental stage and as you get older it is not so cool to be the teacher's buddy anymore, but you do recognize that you had these good teachers and they made you learn. I believe they took pleasure in educating us, and again we did a lot of Afro-centric type of learning which was different. At that early age we started talking about careers and what you wanted to be when you became an adult. I also enjoyed my classmates and developed the same types of relationships as I had at my first school. I was very comfortable, extremely comfortable at the Jamaica-Queens school, although I have to admit to some extent, coming from that prior environment, I felt a little strangeness at first. I don't know if it was because I was used to one environment and then I was totally dropped into something different. I was concerned about my own behavior at first, feeling as though I didn't know how to interact with my own people, but I quickly got over it.

Academically I got excellent grades. I was pretty much a straight A student, pretty much throughout grade school. As I got older things started to change a little bit. At the Cambria Heights school my classmates didn't respond to my high achievement the same as the white students at my first school. It was starting to be looked upon a little differently. I was a newcomer so I guess their first thought was that this kid is an egghead. But I soon dispelled that because I was always one of the best in sports, I was always the person they wanted to pick for kickball, I had this athletic thing

going for me so I never really got pigeonholed as an egghead. I was one of the good guys because I could play sports and I was fun, all of this other stuff that make you cool at that age. I was eventually viewed as one of the regular guys that just happened to get good grades as well. I was accepted but at the same time I started to get a little kidding for getting the good grades and being held up as the example by the teachers. That was one of the things that was different, although it was clear to everyone that the teachers encouraged all of us to do well. Most of the kids at my first school encouraged other students to do well, they expected each other to do well. At Cambria the students were bright but believed that good grades and praise by the teachers were for girls or boys that weren't very "cool." It was kind of like, doing well makes you look bad. You get into that peer pressure thing, but even with that openly negative attitude about good grades, most of the students were doing well and striving for success, they just kept their success from each other and worked hard to keep teachers from giving them public recognition. The teachers did a good job I think in managing all of that confusion for that age group. They held many activities to recognize good students in order to turn that culture around.

I mentioned earlier that I had a friend that lived next door that shared many of my interest, it was interesting, at an early age you think about what it is you want to do with your life. We would always have these conversations about what we wanted to be with our lives. He wanted to be an attorney, I believe he would have been a good one, but he never quite got that far. That was his dream at the time, and my dream, I guess I was undecided. I liked music, I was

good in music at an early age but I also knew that I was good in the math and sciences and all of my teachers said that I should be a doctor or an engineer. I had a bunch of options but I hadn't really thought about it seriously. I liked music, that was my first love and actually still is. I remember my friend and I talking about careers and what we had to do to get there. We had some pretty interesting conversations, for elementary kids, about careers. Because he had parents similar to mine, that talked a lot about what do you want to do when you grow up and what's needed to get there, we kind of compared notes a lot of times. We were never in the same classes, but, you know, our parents talked when we got report cards, so there was this little competition thing we always had. Actually there was a group of us, about six to eight in the neighborhood, our parents knew each other and we developed a real competitive spirit for the best report card. We didn't like for our parents to get together and one parent say that one of us should get grades like the other.

The neighborhood was pretty much the same as the other, the white neighborhood where we lived in terms of being middle class or working middle class, except that these people were mostly Black and all were homeowners. I guess that makes some difference financially, as the other place consisted of high rise rental apartments, but here you had homeowners. So financially these people may have been a little more stable, maybe a step higher.

I participated in extracurricular activities particularly music at an early age. I was very much active in music and arts, in fact, before I started intermediate school I had mastered three instruments. That was something my parents always encouraged me in music. I took



private lessons for piano and guitar, once or twice a week after school I was going to take my piano lessons and that was my joy. You know, outside of playing basketball and other things that kids do, I was in to this music thing. I often dreamed about being a musician until I found out, you know, that there was a lot of starving musicians (laughter), it was then a shattered dream.

The junior high I went to started at sixth grade, and went through sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. I started out going to this intermediate school, in the same neighborhood as my old school, so all the same student faces, but I started to notice that some of the teachers weren't as interested (JA laughs). At that age you start noticing that some of the teachers were not quite as enthusiastic as some of the other teachers were. Also you start noticing that some of your fellow classmates are starting to get a little rougher than they were in grade school. You start noticing those little subtle changes with the type of environment that you have.

I can recall hearing that some of my classmates were not encouraged to improve and work hard. I started hearing about certain kids being told by angry teachers in the heat of anger that "you'll never succeed". I didn't feel that it was a nurturing environment. We had just left an environment where we were told that you can do anything that you put your mind to do, and now it was as though these teachers were now starting to evaluate and judge the students. It was, I guess looking back, for whatever reason they just felt the need to evaluate students rather than develop them and encourage them to meet challenges and try to achieve whatever goals they have set their lives. I thought that they felt the need to evaluate and kind of



pigeonhole some of the kids. I had good grades and had no problems with anything like that. But I was only there for a six month period then my father had an opportunity to work overseas. We moved to Iran where my father took a job with an American company. At that time Iran was a friendly nation respected by the U. S. for the leadership provided by the Iranian Shah. A number of American companies were over there. My dad had an opportunity to work over there as an engineer and that was a great culture shock going over there.

So six months into sixth grade, probably around February or March, we moved to Iran where I attended an American military school. Most of the kids there were obviously the children of military personnel. My dad worked for a, back then it was called the American Bell International, a subsidiary of ATT. So he was a corporate person there, but most of the people there were in the military. The environment there was predominately white with only a handful of Blacks, sort of like the first learning experience I had. It was really different because now the kids are older and the kids were from all over the country if not the world, and I found that there was a lot of racial issues that you had to deal with. As one of a few Black people there, the teachers were not particularly neutral, at least that is what I thought, with Black students. I always felt like I had to do it on my own. I always felt like I had to do a little extra to get the same grade as white students. Up until that point I was used to dealing with teachers that encouraged you and that was suddenly missing, what I noticed was that teachers encouraged certain students and not others, I was one of the others. This disturbed me because I still got good grades and I kind of felt I was being treated

differently. I think that was one of the first times I started recognizing that I might be treated differently even though my performance was on par with everybody, else, amongst the best. It was a different environment, I had friends, I was still very involved in activities, the band, and I still did well in school. A lot of my involvement and high grades was due entirely to what was going on back at home. I had parents encouraging me, making sure that I was doing my home-work, talking to my teachers to make sure that I was doing what I needed to do and pushing me in those things I needed to improve in. I think that if I didn't have that I probably would have performed poorly because I didn't have the feedback, the positive reinforcement that I received from my teachers while in the U. S. Now keep in mind, these teachers were for the most part white Americans teaching mostly American kids, we just happened to be on foreign soil. I don't recall any specific interaction with teachers or with classmates that would suggest that my feelings were well founded. But I do know that there probably was one or two that kicked it off and I probably made up my mind that's how it was and just blew it off, deciding that I would do well anyway. I tend not to dwell on that negative type of stuff and I can't recall a specific example other than --- (JA laughs) there was a time when, you know, I had straight A's on my report card and, you know, I remember the teacher made no comment. Typically when you did well the teacher would write comments, that was always the key, the grade was fine, but you wanted to see comments because that tells you how you're really doing. Yes, I remember getting a great report card and nothing was in the comment section. It was kind of like, you know, they can't dispute the fact

that I got a 95s and 100s that gave them the quantitative number that they had to compute as an A, but it was discounted, they omitted teacher recognition with comments. I guess I was used to that encouragement when I did well and I didn't have that and that troubled me, that really troubled me for some reason. I didn't let it stop me. I went to that school for a year and a half and, although it wasn't the most positive experience on a personal level, academically it was a top notch school. When I returned to my old school in the U. S. I was so far ahead of my classmates, it was incredible. They wanted to skip me up a grade when I returned based on, I guess, whatever standardized tests I took back then which indicated that I was several grade levels ahead of my class in reading and math skills.

I was entering the eighth grade when I returned to the US; I was far ahead of the game. I remember back then, when we were in Iran, I used to read a lot and just bury myself in my books, but I still had my music, we had a pool, and I had my books, that was my life. When I returned, I returned to the same middle school and the same friends, so it was really great to see them. But at the same time, having been away so long, I felt like a complete stranger. This was particularly true since I spoke a little different at that point in life. I guess as a child around white British folks, and a whole lot of different folks, your English, your diction begin to change, you start to take on the speech characteristics of the group dominating all aspects of your school and social life. This type of thing can really alienate you in a Black community at that age. Ahhmm, it was kind of "oh you're talking white." That can be a bad thing in certain communities and I remember having to deal with that a little bit. So I guess you



adapt at some point. You start speaking a slang after a while and re-learn to pronounce words and structure statements in a manner encouraged by our people (JA laughs and comments that it is like speaking two languages). I always knew how to speak and write English consistent with the expectations of my teachers. Again, the school wanted to jump me up a grade but my parents said no because they recognized that I was going through enough and to put me in a higher grade with an older group of kids might not help. They were thinking of my social well being and we talked about that, they asked me "what do you want to do?" I said well, I'd like to but you know, they're older kids, and I guess they could see where I was coming from.

While in Iran, my parents were more involved in my schooling. Their presence was greater while there for several reasons. First of all, my mother wasn't working while in Iran, so she had more time to spend with that type of activity more than before. Perhaps more important, there was a different situation there. I didn't understand it at first but I eventually realized that they had an uneasiness about the shape and quality of the experience I would receive.

My parents always encouraged me to develop in areas where I was having difficulty and made sure that I set aside time to study in order to improve in those areas. They encouraged discipline, believing that discipline would always be a key asset. My studying was kind of routine, I would come in from school, go out to play a while and after dinner it was time to do your homework, and you were expected to work until you finished. If I finished before my bed time, I was permitted to watch TV or whatever. Now if I didn't do my homework, my parents weren't necessarily the type that checked after



me, they worked on trust. They would at times if they thought it was necessary, if I was getting a bad grade in a particular subject. Typically they would just observe to make sure that I, at least, looked like I was studying at a given point in the day. But they weren't like some parents that checked your homework and grilled you over the answers. They weren't like that, (JA laughs) but it was real dumb to violate that trust.

I was an honor roll student, but much of my recognition was in music, I mean I was the man when it came to music. I was in the jazz band, I was in the orchestra, I was in a whole bunch of different bands that they had at the school, and I was recognized for that ability as well. So I had this academic thing and I also had the music.

My music and academics led to an interesting decision, because in New York you don't necessarily go to a neighborhood high school. You can select your school, it was common for kids to go all over the city to high school. And for me, I had to decide what I wanted to do. Again, music was my love, at the same time I was real good in math and science and family always encourage you to follow your dream while at the same time telling you about those bright kids that want to become a doctor or a lawyer, and adding that the money is there, you know, that type thing. So, I had a touchy decision to make. I applied to the performing arts school, which is the high school that "Fame" was filmed around. At the same time I applied, as my second choice, to Brooklyn Technical High School which is a math and science oriented school. At that time it was considered to be one of the best high schools in the country in terms of academic preparation for college.

You actually had to take a test to be admitted to either of these schools and I passed that test. So I had this choice, a real heavy decision facing me. I remember talking to my parents about it and they said "well you can do whatever you want to do, it is your life and your decision." However, (JA laughs) they gave me some of the consequences of what I believe they considered to be a wrong decision. Basically they showed me --- as parents are so skillful in doing --- that there are a lot of starving musicians, suggesting that if I do this academic thing I would have many more options and my destiny would be more under my control. But they still said "you can make your own decision." Well, it was pretty clear what I should do (JA gives a very hardy laugh), so I went to Brooklyn Technical High School.

I found the initial experience to be very interesting. Now I was in a school full of kids with outstanding academic ability. They were all achievers and a very diverse mix of students. For the first time I was in an environment that was probably fifty percent white and fifty percent other. I mean, it was about as culturally diverse as I have ever seen for a learning environment. It was an extremely diverse group of students, with all groups represented; we had Orientals, Blacks, Hispanics, and whites. I would guess that it was more like fifty percent white, thirty percent Black, ten percent Asian and ten percent Hispanics. I would guess that of the fifty percent white students, kids of the Jewish faith represented at least one-half of that group. Now I am just giving you my estimate, I don't know if it is totally accurate. But the overall bottom line was that I recall a very rich, culturally diverse environment. The teachers and staff,

as I recall, was a very diverse group. For the first time I was in an environment where you kind of get a variety of perspectives. We had students with different experiences and knowledge that they could contribute to the environment, it was a very enriching environment.

Academically I did well the first year or so, I did very well, pretty much what I did in the past. But I guess at that point in life I was starting to find out about other things. I was finding out about the girls and getting involved in sports. I started playing football at that point, I believe it was my sophomore year, and was doing very well in that sport. Suddenly I started finding other things that diverted my attention from the books. I continued to do pretty good with the grades, I would say that I was a B or B- student from that point forward. I was no longer the A student and it was harder for my parents to get me to put in the hours to maintain my A grade point average. I was going to football practice, and when I got home I was so tired that I didn't feel like doing homework. Usually I would end up doing my work on the train (subway) going to school. You know, it was a different situation now that I was older, I didn't always follow my parents advice. But I thought that I was doing ok.

Although my parents didn't agree, I felt that my social development really took off at that point. I believed this because for the first time I kind of recognized how I fit into the overall global community (JA laughs and commented that my parents were positive that I was spaced out - they would ask "what is this global world that you are imagining?"). I mean we have a world that's made up of a whole bunch of different perspectives, and prior to that I was either in a white group or this huge dominating Black environment.



For the first time I was in something that was culturally mixed, and that school was really good about recognizing that there are a whole bunch of cultures and that you're just a member of one of them. You were encouraged to make contributions as an individual with a cultural perspective but not as the spokesperson for any group. It was a very healthy environment and I moved by leaps and bounds socially, it was at that point that I expanded in terms of leadership. I started getting out there and becoming more of a leader in certain activities, such as student government, I became captain of my football team and in general I started to expand my interest. I was never president of any student group but I became my class delegate. Every class had a delegate. You ran for delegate, but in all honesty it was a popularity contest (JA laughs), but you had to run and I was elected by me peers to represent them. That was the first time I had ever given any thought to running for an elected position. At that time I also started dating and developed an increased recognition of the opposite sex. As a member of the football team I focused on the cheerleaders. If the cheerleaders showed interest in you it was always a big thing because they were the more popular girls in school. Being a fairly good player, I was pretty popular with the cheerleaders. So there were lots of things to divert my attention at that age (JA laughs). However, I only had three or four girlfriends over those four years. My friends and I only dated Black females, that included Puerto Rican sisters (Black Puerto Rican females). My dating was always African American and Black Hispanic females.

While attending Brooklyn Technical High School I received a number of awards and special recognition for athletics. Primarily, at



this point my attention was very much on the athletic side of school. I got a slew of awards for my athletic ability. I was captain of the football team for two years, I received the partial scholarship award that they give to the best high school athlete, I was my schools football teams' MVP (most valuable player) for two years, I was All City (an award given to the top athletes in NY City), and many other awards in athletics. I was feeding off of that. Although I still maintained decent grades, and I really did well on the SATs, I didn't maintain the A grades that would have brought me special academic recognition and I regret that because that made my parents very sad. My SAT score was around 1230 and my GPA was only 2.8, nowhere near what I was capable of doing. I was able to maintain fair grades and have my fun at the same time, but I guess what I'm saying, for the first time in my junior and senior years in high school, I started slipping. I got my first F during that period. My attention was starting to turn too much in the wrong direction, but I still graduated in fair shape.

Before I go too far I would just like to talk about some people that made a difference in my thinking. I guess the first person that comes to mind is my junior high school music teacher. I can't remember his name but he was an Italian guy and he always took a special interest in me, he recognized my potential. I remember once after a concert when I had this really great solo, he pulled me aside and said "you know you could really do something with this music if you really wanted to." That was the first time, I think any teacher really, I mean it was the first time someone really pointed me out and said, you know you could really achieve something with this. It meant

a lot to me and it carried over in a lot of other things that I did back then. He sat down with me and just talked about music. He asked "how do you feel about music?" and this was around the time when I had to take the exams for the performing arts high school. I think he was thinking about the upcoming exams in order to get me thinking about music as a viable option. He really took an interest in me and he didn't have to, I didn't bring it up, I didn't approach him, he came up to me and said "you know, you could really do something if you wanted to", and that meant a lot.

That very positive experience with a teacher is contrasted with a negative experience by a teacher during my senior year in high school. When I started slipping a little, I think for the first time in my life, I had a teacher to tell me, basically, that I couldn't cut it in college. The situation was this, when you are in senior high school you have colleges that come in to recruit. They tell you about the school and what they have to offer in terms of academics, social and other experiences. Typically you had to get a pass to leave your class to go meet with these recruiters. In this particular situation I was in a class that I was not particularly interested in, not that I was a bad person in class but the teacher could honestly tell that I was not trying nor was I interested. He didn't really know me as a person, he didn't know what kind of grades I got overall, he just saw me in his class not getting it done --- in fact that was one of the classes that I got an F in. I was scheduled to go to one of these college career sessions and when I gave this teacher the pass, he looked at me and said "I don't know why you're going to this meeting". He was serious, because I recalled that he added "there is no way in

the world you will ever get into a college and there is no way in the world you will ever become an engineer." I didn't know what I wanted to do, I didn't know if I wanted to wring his neck or if I was just embarrassed. But more importantly, I think it just hurt. That was the first time anybody had ever said anything like that to me and that stuck in my mind. I remember going back to my high school for a class reunion and looking for that guy (JA laughs), because in a lot of ways he gave me motivation and strength to succeed. That was a very nasty and degrading experience.

One final comment on my precollege experience. I am from a very religious environment, my mother was a deaconess in the Methodist church and we always went to church every Sunday. Religion was always a part of my life but, in all honesty, I really didn't understand what that was all about in those early years. I just went to church because I was told to go. Somewhere during the high school years, I guess you get a little older and parents don't make you go to church anymore, it is up to you and I chose not to go. So, I was raised a certain way, taught to love God but I got lost along the way, perhaps starting in high school and it continued for a while in college. But then, I have to tell you, without going back to my Christian family experience while in college, I would not have made it. In my sophomore year I finally got back to my family teachings and re-discovered the church, that really turned things around for me and I've been a different person since. I will say more about that later.

When I started to decide on a college I had a interesting experience. I never heard of Lafayette College, until having a chance discussion with a high school coach. One day I was in the car with my



junior varsity football coach, a man between 65 and 70 years of age at that time. He started asking me questions about college, my grades and my high school major. I think he recognized that I was a pretty good football player and a fair student. Maybe he believed if I worked hard I might be able to go to college on a scholarship of some sort. That was the first time he mentioned Lafayette College, asking if I would be interested in making application to this college. He told me later that he was a graduate of Lafayette and I discovered later that he was a staunch Alumnus. Although I told him that I was very interested, I had never heard of Lafayette College. Nothing happened following that conversation and by my senior year my situation was a little different as an athlete. You have these college coaches coming to you, calling my house, calling my parents trying to get me to come visit their school. I have to admit that if I was not a good athlete these colleges would not have pursued so vigorously, leaving me on my own attempting to figure out how to select a college with limited resources. Our guidance counselors were not particularly helpful. We had a lot of Black kids, without knowledgeable parents to guide them, losing out on great schools that they could have gone to and received financial assistance, but they never got the information nor received help from counselors. Fortunately for me, as an athlete, I had these college recruiters educating me on the different colleges. Some of my classmates who didn't have that might send away for an application, and eventually they might follow-up. These very bright Black students would procrastinate, slumbering deadlines and not obtaining information to help make decisions. If their parents didn't know how to push the



counselors, students would not be assisted by those people. Many of these kids ended up going to community colleges. I have a friend that attended that high school and was directed to a community college by a counselor when he asked for information on colleges. My friend went to his minister and was advised to make application to Yale where he graduated with honors in Biology.

Remembering my conversation with my junior varsity coach, I wanted to visit Lafayette College as a way of showing my appreciation for his interest in my future. I went up to Lafayette with my parents and I fell in love with the college. Lafayette is in a small Pennsylvania town with lots of trees, where people say 'hi' to you and that intrigued me. At first Eastern, Pa., the town where the college was located, put me on my guard because I was not use to that, having gone to school in Brooklyn and living in Queens. But there was something very refreshing about all of that. I visited other schools as well, some of them very similar, Colgate University, and a couple of schools on Long Island. But I chose Lafayette because that was where I felt most comfortable. I also felt that it was a top notch school which would offer me an excellent education. They were also providing a financial package that I needed because at that point my father had sent two kids to school. Times were tight and he made it clear to me that he wanted to help but I might have to go in the service (JA laughs) "if we can't get you into a school willing to give you a full or partial athletic scholarship." So, I got the athletic scholarship, it worked out great.

When I went to Lafayette my transition was made somewhat easy because I went to school with one of my high school classmates. He

was a Black guy that also played on the football team and we were roommates our first year. So I at least had someone who I felt comfortable with. We weren't best friends in high school but under the circumstances you're willing to adapt (JA laughs). You know, he wasn't particularly a person I wanted to hang out with in high school but in this situation we became roommates and friends. He ended up having to leave the school. The social life was interesting because there was very little in the way of activities for Black students. Most of the activities involved drinking, going to these pub nights at these white fraternities, we didn't have any Black fraternities back then. You had to make a personal decision, do I want to be out there in that purely white environment or do I need something else. It was a tough decision for many of us but I guess I was a little different because as an athlete you're always treated a little differently. As a college athlete you're embraced much more than the average Black student, you know you go out on that field every weekend and you perform for them and for that you're seen as a positive person on the campus. In my case I wasn't particularly interested in that because I had my friends back home, and I was terribly homesick, I missed them, I missed my family and I wanted to transfer.

Academically, my first semester was pretty good, I had like a 2.8. I started out in engineering, so things looked pretty good but I was having a rough time with the adjustment. My roommate was a knucklehead I thought, because he was the type, he wanted to go to those pub nights and you know, he was perfectly delighted to give up his identity to be around whites. He was pretty much like that at Brooklyn Tech. He was going out there every night, coming in late,

throwing up after having drank all night. We were very different when it came to our social preferences. He tended to be the one to hang out with the white students, where I preferred being to myself or with the other Black students. We only had about fifty Black students, about two or three percent of the student body.

In my first year I hung in there with my roommate from Brooklyn Tech, we were pretty good friends but he looked at life a little differently than I did. Second year a group of us Black male students, all of us were on the football team, got a house together on campus. We had our own little community. My first year roommate became a member of one of the white fraternities and got involved in their house and eventually that kind of led to his demise (JA laughs). The partying and constant drinking, that was not what he needed. His white friends didn't care, he was their athlete and their entertainment. The house on campus that my friends and I lived in was a college owned building used by the Association of Black Collegians (ABC). We had a house as an organization, a place where we would hold meetings, events, etc. The upstairs portion of that house consisted of residential units, so we had six rooms. We had the upstairs portion of this ABC house in my sophomore and junior years. I moved back into the dorms my senior year.

The ABC tried to do many things to improve the social and cultural life of the Black students and the nearby town. We organized Black history month and attempted to do things with the Black community, it was a relatively large Black community in the town of Easton. We would try to bring Black Alumni in, but it was a pretty weak effort, meaning either the students just did not get interested

in it or it wasn't the right thing for us. That all changed my second year. We took over the house and basically took it upon ourselves to change things. We really made a conscious decision amongst ourselves to make life interesting on that campus and to do more for the Black students. We organized parties, we worked with the Association of Black Engineers, held job fairs, we got involved with the local Black community, we organized a program for Black children and worked with the younger kids from kindergarten up. Eventually we brought in Black fraternities and sororities to the campus. We just made a decision that we were going to create a life for Black students at Lafayette College and we did it.

The college was receptive to everything except the Black fraternities (JA laughs). They started balking then because, I guess they heard about hazing and some of that stuff that Black fraternities do. But eventually we sold them on the idea. They were also concerned that we were going to create some organization that would try to separate the Black community from the rest of the college community. Our selling point was no, we will not separate the groups, quite the opposite, we will unite the community. We saw our organization as creating a link to the rest of the school and the fraternity, through activities such as community services that we will do, will pull the school together. In fact we had a lot of dance marathons and fund raisers for Africa and the entire student body would get involved, which was interesting. So it turned out to be a really positive thing for the school but it took them a while to see that.



When I entered Lafayette as a freshman, I came in as an engineering student and we had a pretty well developed minority engineering program, where you had, in addition to a regular advisor we all got faculty advisors. In addition to that we had the director of the minority engineering program which typically was a Black person. And between the two they would work with you to develop your curriculum, they would monitor your grades, they would provide tutoring and study groups. That tutoring relied on the senior students who had been through it so to speak. They provided a lot of information about careers. There was a pretty good effort to get you information and help you get your courses started. It started to fall short though after I'd been there a while. For instance, I guess for me, I came there juiced up and ready to go and I had a great first semester in engineering. In my second semester there, I had to maintain or improve my grades and I did not improve (JA laughs).

My average in the first semester was a 2.5 or 2.6. In engineering that's considered ok. At that time I was very dissatisfied with the curriculum and I really could not see the end or maybe I didn't know what all of this would lead me to. I was taking these outrageous courses that I believe are designed to make students fail. At a school like Lafayette, the first year they try to weed out the people that are not serious and I guess after my first semester I felt that I was not serious about engineering anymore. I had the feeling that there was something else I wanted to do, and engineering was not it, it was just painful. It was at that point that I started investigating other careers.

Looking back, I don't think my advisor probed enough to really get at the heart of what I was really interested in. Someone else did eventually but at that point no one seemed to have the interest or time to help me decide on a career or direction for the future. I then started doing something in psychology and in the meanwhile time was ticking on. I took a couple courses in economics and business, thinking maybe that's where I wanted to be. I really was floundering throughout this whole process as you can imagine.

My educational experience can be summed up in the African proverb which says that "if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." At that point I had no motivation, I was doing very poorly in school, in fact I was on academic probation a number of semesters, I mean I had serious problems. My first semester I had a 2.8 and that second semester of my first year I had a 2.0, at least I was passing, but then the bottom fell out. After I moved into the ABC house --- that might have been a mistake looking back. We had a lot of fun, but the grades started slipping. I started to focus on a lot of other things and my problems were clearly my fault, but a good counselor might have caught some of those warning signs earlier. It never happened and it was not until the end of my second year when I had a 1.0 GPA that I heard from my counselor and advisor. Now they are concerned that I might get thrown out of school and my coach was concerned because he might lose a starting player. They started to get me tutoring and other help. I had a lot of resources and attention with these failing grades my problem wasn't tutoring, it wasn't lack of ability, it was motivation and it was a need for someone to help me decide what to do with my life, that is what I

needed. I needed to talk to someone about my future, my career, someone to help me understand what I would do with a college degree, not some individual to assume that I was dumb due to his feelings about Blacks in college. You have to have a vision of what it is you want to be, I had no vision. I knew that I was good in football, I loved music and my outlet at that point became serving as a disc jockey for the college radio station (JA laughs), that was something else I really needed. I had my turn tables and records and I was doing all the parties instead of studying. I was making money but hurting my grades. No-where along the way did anyone help me to identify or figure out what it was that I wanted to do after college. I needed a vision of what it was that I was trying to accomplish, what it was that I wanted to be, and what it was that I was striving for. When you are in that state of mind where you're just kind of there, you are just kind of participating in school as a social event and eventually that catches up to you.

In addition to those things that I just mentioned, you also have the usual things that you hear students talk about. You have the partying, you have the drinking and yeah, I admit to experimenting with, you know basic drugs, I had all that stuff going on at Lafayette. The basic drug for me was marijuana and towards the end when it was getting real bad, I started dabbling with cocaine. It was pretty easy to get that stuff on my campus, much easier than anyone except the students would realize. Ah but fortunately I never got that far on that ladder, but ah those things are available. I had used a little marijuana since my sophomore year in high school but most of the kids at my high school used a little pot. My social life

picked up when I started using that stuff and you know, being a football star, everyone is giving you the stuff, I mean you don't buy a thing your classmates give it to you. I didn't try coke until the early part of my junior year in college. It was not something that I was proud of and I didn't use it for very long.

My academic difficulty pretty much started my second semester first year and continued until the beginning of my senior year. It wasn't until I met a certain professor that I would notice things beginning to turn around for me. At that point it was getting pretty late in my college career and I had to get my act together. I knew my pops wasn't going to let me live at home without a job. I met this professor, this guy was interesting, a white guy, I'd say he was about forty something maybe, a hippie with a braided ponytail and a philosophy professor. I met him in a summer school course. I went to school summers throughout my stay at Lafayette just to keep on track. I took a class of his the summer following my junior year and somehow, by fate, he ended up being my counselor the following year.

As my counselor, he asked some basic questions that no one asked since my early youth. He asked "what do you want to do with yourself?" He would look at my grades and say "hummm, you're not doing too well are you, so what is it you want to do?" And I was like, well what do you mean, become a doctor or lawyer, is that what you mean? "No! What is it that you like to do?" I talked about music, I talked about athletics, and would come back on me say "No, no --- I am trying to find out what types of things do you want to do when you leave this place, so tell me what do you like to do?" I said well, I like to deal with people, I like reading and writing, I like math and science,



I like solving problems, you know that type of thing. That is what he was driving at. He simply said "humm, sounds like you would make a good industrial engineer." And my prior knowledge was that engineers don't do that, that's more like marketing, somebody else does that but not engineers, they are responsible for the dry design stuff. My advisor helped me to understand what I enjoyed doing and that the things I enjoyed are available to engineers as well as in a couple of other fields. He continued pushing, "Which field do you like, which one sound interesting to you?" He just pushed me to think, constantly asking "what do you see yourself doing, which one of these professions would you enjoy?"

That professor helped to give me the focus I needed to continue my education. Ultimately I found my way to this industrial engineering area which involves a lot of things I described. OK, now with that decision in place (deciding on a college major), he helped me to figure out a way to get there. It seemed kind of impossible at the time, there I was beginning my senior year, and I must have had maybe a 2.0 GPA, if that high. To me it seemed pretty impossible to get there but he was encouraging and he used some basic motivational tools to get me going. He helped me to see the end and the life I could have if I did certain things, he helped me lay out a path to get there and then he basically said it is on you, if you really want it, if you do these things you will achieve it. Again, it was great that for the first time in a long while someone helped to give me the vision, put me back on path and then encourage me. He was really good about, you know, just tracking my stuff and I didn't disappoint him, I did well. He helped me to understand why I did well. He would ask

"what did you do different to earn a B rather a D?" He helped me to see what I was doing right and what I was doing wrong instead of talking down to me. Somewhere along the way I had lost that competitive edge that I used to have, and at that time I needed someone to work with me. As it turned out my last year, and I had to go an extra semester like I said, I had to bust my butt because I had a lot of catching up to do. Over that last year and a half, I had over a 3.0 GPA. Something else was going on in my life, as I mentioned earlier. I started dating a freshman, of all people, and you know, she was a person who was raised in a Christian home, and everyday after she completed her homework she would read the Bible. There was something about that that attracted me to her. Our relationship grew and she kind of helped me to understand some things, you know, and I became a born again Christian through the guidance of this girl and her mother. That really, I think, helped to fuel me, give me the sense that I could achieve anything I put my mind to. She was an active member of a holiness church where they tended to focus a lot more on what the Bible says, giving interpretation to what the Bible says. When I went to this church I discovered that they were much more into teaching than hooting and hollering which they are often accused of. I learned a lot about myself and it was an instrumental part in my development, I don't think I would have made it otherwise.

Black students did not do very well academically at Lafayette. No one really understood the reasons why, but if you looked at the GPA of Black students, they were significantly lower than the GPA of white students. I think, in looking back, that there was some sort of

stigma attached to Black students, and I believe that I kinda bought into that stigma. If you are given information saying that you're probably not going to do too well, particularly as a Black engineering student. Failure is like a self-fulfilling prophecy if you keep hearing it enough. I know for myself at some point I lost confidence in my ability. As a youth in elementary and high school, I thought I could learn anything if you would give me five minutes to read it and I will be able to master it. Somewhere along the way in college I lost that and in fact, the opposite occurred; I started doubting myself. It was tough for me to figure out what caused the shattering of my confidence. I don't know if it was one experience or if it was just the college environment. I do remember that it was an environment where you were constantly being told how hard it would be to succeed. In Engineering, we were constantly being told that they were weeding out the people who couldn't cut it. I realized that the message was for all students but amongst the Black campus community it was taken to another level because so many Blacks had tried to do well and failed. So there was, like I said the stigma, there was a stigma of poor performance of mediocre performance amongst the Black community. I believe the faculty sort of expected the Black students to do poorly. As I reflect back, I can think of cases where my ability was discounted before I even had a chance and you know, as a result you just say oh well, you can either do one thing you can either step up to the plate and show your stuff or go to the back of the classroom and just sit there like a bump on a log. I think I did that for a while, I kind of accepted the latter as my role for a while, instead of getting to bat and showing what I could really do.

I believe that there were some professors who acted on the belief that the college admitted all of these Black students and student athletes and they don't really belong here. We often heard the white students say to athletes that "you are here because you're an athlete, not because you had the academic ability to be here." I have also heard them say that "you are here because you are a Black athlete." Usually you heard that for athletes in general, but it appeared as though it was in connection with Black athletes, that it was most frequently raised. There was also a feeling that you had that there was something racial underlying these statements.

In general, I sensed that white students felt as though Black students were there on campus because of some special effort on the part of the college to bring them in as opposed to their ability and their merit getting them there. As a matter of fact, other Black students shared this feeling --- it was not disguised when directed at Black athletes. If you looked at our (Black students on campus) total population, it was 2% of the student body, and the athletic teams (football, basketball and track) were about 50% Black. I mean it was clear that many of the Blacks on that campus participated in athletics, but what the white students tended to conveniently forget was that Lafayette did not just bring in athletes, they had to meet the academic qualifications also. Although I don't know if they went as far as to give credit to regular Black students as being quality students, realizing that they deserved to be there, but I will put it this way, I don't think they made as much of a negative assumption as they did for the Black athletics.



However, there was another category of Black students that also got that sort of treatment. It was common knowledge that a number of the students were there on "need based scholarships." For instance, my roommate in my junior year was from Harlem, no way he'd be able to afford that school, so there was a financial subsidy provided for, you know, people of color and people of color in need, he was both. So there was always a thing with him and we used to talk about how he was viewed by some of the white students, the belief that he was there because he was Black and poor instead of being simply worthy. The college had a number of different scholarships: they had those that were just need based regardless of race; there were a number of, I guess, opportunities for students of color; I know they had something for --- I don't know, maybe I am saying scholarship for a certain pool of funds set up by alumni --- but they had certain opportunities for valued segments of the community and many of these opportunities targeted white students --- an example was the outstanding male and female athlete from Pennsylvania. I believe the athletes had to be the child of a graduate in order to qualify. (JA laughs and says that his friends' children would be excluded because they live in other states).

On a social level, life at Lafayette was pretty hard for the Black student. We were pretty much discounted, at least we felt that we were, since there were no activities really designed for us. We had to do everything on our own without much support from the school. White student government leaders and their faculty advisors focused activities primarily around the white student organizations. You had the white fraternities, sororities and service organizations that

benefited from the planning of social activities for students. I think I should say this before going on, essentially there were two types of Black students at Lafayette College: 1) There were those Black students that came in sort of like my roommate who, I would say, adapted themselves to the environment and became part of the fraternities and sorties. The majority of their friends might have been white, and many of them changed the way they dressed and spoke, you know what I mean. 2) Then there was another group that really worked hard at maintaining our culture and identity. I was a part of that group. I, along with others, was very dissatisfied with my life at Lafayette, which resulted in a group of us getting together with the common mission of maintaining our culture and making college life meaningful for Black students. It was obvious to all us that the school's role in all of this was one of discouragement. They really didn't support our effort, but they readily supported white fraternities and sororities, giving them money to drink and have parties. Of course, on the positive side, the college did support some of the fraternities actions for job fairs and other responsible activities. When we (as Black students) tried to do the same, we received very little support. There was usually a little something that they would scrape off the bottom of the barrel to give to the Black students. We always felt like we were not getting support to do anything positive for our people. It was as though, if we wanted something positive we would have to become a part of the campus culture, the white campus culture, sacrificing our own. In other words, their attitude was simply one which suggested that what they were doing was good, it was positive and if we, as Black students

wanted to belong, just come and join us. To them what they were doing was not only good but also the right thing to do. The message was don't worry about your culture, just become part of our culture and our response was, well, we have a culture and we want to enrich that culture. Sure we wanted to be a part of the academic fiber and culture but we wanted to maintain what we have and they couldn't understand that. That view was seen by them as sort of militant and separatist or isolationist view. I guess if we accepted "whiteness" as the standard, some attempt would be made to give us "honorary" status as whites as is often given to some Asian groups. However, (JA laughs) we would lose on that one because we would be required to distance ourselves from the idea and identity of blackness. What I mean is that skin color is also important to this "honorary" status of "whiteness."

Once we realized the game the college was playing, the Black students at Lafayette became very active. We became active with the Association of Black Collegiates, we organized a Black fraternity, and we became very active in school activities. I was disc jockey for the school radio station, we got involved in the student government, realizing if we were going to improve ourselves we had to get on the Pan-Hellenic Council, which was a decision making body for fraternities and sororities, they ran the place. As painful as it was, we learned to deal with that crazy system that wasn't working for us in order to get it to work for us to some extent, so that we could have some happiness. We spent a lot of time doing things to get involved in the school, to change our lives there. As I look back, I believe the school was racist and what we had to go through was



unnecessary, but it made me a much better person today, because no matter where I am, I realize that my destiny is in my hands. There is always something that I can do to change things. Isn't it interesting that young white students do not have this burden, it is there for them just as they knew it would be --- we (Black students) fight just to maintain a small piece of our identity. When I reflect on those things that influenced me to persist through college as well as those things that tended to inhibit, discourage or interfere with my certainty, my intention to persist to degree completion, I feel troubled that much of my youth was lost in a struggle for survival.

The first thought that comes to mind was clearly my rediscovery of my faith, that faith that gave me the incredible strength to see the college experience through. I also developed some extremely close friendships where we supported each other, we knew what we were all going through --- a sort of sharing of a common experience, and our experience went beyond just the sorority and fraternity thing. There was a network of friends that really worked together to help each other, to help each other do well on exams and in our classes. You know my roommate was also an engineering student and in our junior year we worked really hard to bring each other up and that made a big difference. I felt like I had this group of people that I could rely on or gain strength from. Another positive experience was the whole thing with the fraternity, it was, to me, a conscious choice on the part of a number of Black students to change their destiny on campus. At that point it could have been real easy for me to just slide back and take the attitude that I will just get through these next two years and be out of here. But a group of us decided that we were



going to change the way we were living and create an environment for ourselves and other Blacks on the campus. We grew from that experience. We faced a lot of adversity, but we grew from that adversity.

I find it tough when considering those things which interfered with my certainty of purpose, my determination to earn a college degree. I mean, there were so many negative and unpleasant experiences that I encountered at Lafayette College that I can't seem to put my finger on any one. I guess the overall lack of support for the Black student community on the part of the college was remarkably unpleasant and the most difficult to understand. We as Black students, were pretty much on our own. I mean, we were a small segment of this huge operation and we didn't know anybody, we didn't have connections like the white students. Their fathers, mothers or family friends either graduated from Lafayette or went to school with a professor, a dean, or perhaps the president is a friend. We didn't have that kind of thing going on in our individual or collective background. It is as though you're a member of a small community, you don't have much support, you're really on your own and you must learn to fend for yourself. Although that could be a positive thing because you learn a lot from the experience, but it isn't much fun. At my school, we had very few, what I would call, academic role models. How would I describe it? The faculty, staff and administration was white and the few Black seniors represented a small percentage of those Blacks in their entering class. Most had flunked out long before their senior year, and the remaining seniors, I would not describe as being super achievers. They had kind of stayed on path and seen the

course through, you know, got their 2.5 GPA and hatted-up (departed as fast as possible with the least amount of problems). There weren't a whole lot of Black students that you could point to as leading their class, you know, demonstrating academic excellence. I can't think of one, which is terrible, --- there is something there really bad when you can't point to someone in your group of people achieving excellence at your college. Now in sports, oh yeah, we have tons of people achieving there, and that was our claim to fame, but academically we were really weak, there was nothing there, must be a lot of reasons for that.

As a result of my experience at Lafayette I feel as though I have a real insight as to how the, I guess for lack of a better phrase, the white community works. I really understand the politics behind it, I understand how they interact, I understand how they communicate, I understand how they get things done, and all that's from my observation in my life at Lafayette. I really understand how they mingled --- they had a bunch of rich white kids there --- I mean, I know how they communicate, how they get jobs, I know how they fill out job applications and do their resumes. So for me, I think the thing that I got out of this non-classroom college experience was an understanding of how the game is played, and I know how to play that game without selling myself out. Some of my friends who went to, say a Howard University, they struggle trying to find a way to get a foot in the door, perhaps assuming that there is a logical method for opening doors. They do not understand how that game is played and they beat their head against the wall at times trying to figure it out. Another learning experience is the value of communication. It

is really a basic skill, but a lot of folks don't have it. Being able to write, being able to speak clearly so that it is understandable, using an appropriate vocabulary. A number of our folks don't get it, they don't get the importance of written and verbal communication for some reason. I don't know why and I see that problem amongst some of our folks I work with here. I believe that communication is definitely a strength.

I haven't been back to Lafayette too many times since graduating. I've gone to one or two homecomings, returned to visit friends before they graduated, other than that the only other time I went back was for my company, I was doing some recruiting for my company. Otherwise I don't go back there (JA laughed). I don't feel a closeness or kinship to that school. I feel a responsibility to the students that are there now, the Black students that are there. In all honesty, I have very little, what I would call allegiance to the school. Although I admit to cash donations, even though I feel no particular allegiance to them, I do have a sense of concern for the Black students that are there now, dealing with all of that white bullshit that I had to deal with. I often wonder if (conditions at Lafayette) it is better or worse now. When I left I felt that it was better than it was when I got there, and I am not sure if that is the case now. But, do you know what, my attitude has started to change. I mean, for the first few years after graduating I didn't want to see that place, I didn't want them to send me any mailings, I wanted nothing to do with Lafayette College. What I find as I'm getting older and some of my fellow classmates are getting older, we reminisce about some of the positive experiences we shared as students, in spite

of the pain and some suffering, we got out of it all right. We are now talking about going back to the campus to be with each other on campus. I guess we want to go back because we left our youth on that campus (JA laughs), they made us take on adult fights before we finished our fun --- that chapter in our lives is still open. Seriously, we are now discussing the school and the need to get together as a group to talk to the Black students. There were no role models there for us when we were there, and now that some of us are doing pretty good, maybe we can become role models. This is something we've been talking about, helping them see the end, see the vision. We want them to know that there is life after Lafayette. The school doesn't always help students to see that but maybe we need to get more active in doing it.



### Profile of Nick

The profile is of a university professor who grew up in western Massachusetts. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Mass. He was raised in a two parent family household with his younger brother and two younger sisters. Nick, now in his early 40s, is married and resides with his wife and son in western Mass.

I first got the idea that I would go to college when my father came home from his construction job when I was a kid --- he was a construction laborer at the time, working at WSC building the dormitories --- he was talking about the college and he said that "it seemed like a good place to go to school." I guess he was shooting the breeze with the President of the college who would come around to the job site and watch them while they worked. From that point on, when I was seven or eight years old, there was never a doubt in my mind about going to college. My old man was a laborer, he was a hod carrier and he discouraged me from doing this kind of work. He would say very often that if I didn't go to college that I'd be a mule the rest of my life. And so being naturally disinclined to do physical labor, I went with that idea (N. M. laughed). I would help him, he would curse at me most of the time I was helping him. And now when I reflect back on it, and as he's told me in recent years, he did that on purpose because he didn't want me to get the idea that I'd be a laborer. And I just proceeded to go through public school with that goal in mind. I would say the other significant thing in this regard in the early years was an Irish principal who was a part of that Irish immigrant wave that made up most of the politics in Massachusetts. I

had a principal who gave me books and evidently I displayed some kind of facility for academics. Although, you know, I wasn't really up on it, you know, understanding what was going on entirely. All I knew, was I took a couple of standardized exams and for some reason I did better than most people in the school. In fact, I remember this incident, I scored one point lower than a white girl who was the minority in our elementary school of mostly African Americans and Puerto Ricans. I remember them making a big deal that she scored highest on the exam, it was either one point or a half a point higher than me. It always stuck with me how second place didn't really count N. M. laughed), you know.

My early experiences were extremely important in shaping my response to education. My father had been a coal miner for seven years and then he was a hod carrier which was an intense labor job on a construction site. He literally carried bricks in a wooden basket attached to a two by four, up and down a scaffold all day, because they had no machinery in those days). Sometimes when he was eating he would be falling asleep, that's how tired he was you know. What he meant was (when he said "if I didn't go to college I'd be a mule the rest of my life") I would be breaking my ass for the rest of my life if I didn't figure out some other way to use my mind to make a living, that's what he meant. That was pretty much the indoctrination over the years, certainly from age seven on, that education was the way to avoid that kind of experience. I was a first generation college graduate, no one in my family had gone to college, In fact, most of them hadn't --- I take that back, I would say a good number of them had graduated from high school. They were from a coal mining town in

West Virginia and they went to segregated schools and the superintendent down there, a Black man name Belcher, was a legend in that area. And they got some real quality high school education. My father and mother, they knew a lot of stuff that college students don't know. But none of the family had gone to college, no. From my house, you know, reading was always emphasized even though I wasn't breaking my neck to do much of it. My father kind of rode me about it and that helped me to read some, which turned out to be a foundation, a thing that helped me from then on. My elementary school principal, a white Irishman, was interested in sharing books with us. I remember him taking an interest in our learning in the first grade and by the third grade he was loaning me books. In school we had some, I would say real authentic teachers. I remember this old white woman, my first grade teacher took a lot of interest in me. I remember her encouraging me to know things and that was good. We had a fourth grade teacher, all the teachers were white by the way, I think they had one Black teacher in the school but I didn't study under her. We had another teacher, a guy in the fourth grade who was a merchant marine and he did a lot of interesting stuff. I felt encouraged by what he had and my experience with him. The sixth grade teacher was another guy that stands out in my mind, an Italian guy who encouraged me, again you know, to study. It was positive, the whole experience from kindergarten to the sixth grade.

Then, when they had urban renewal and they tore down our neighborhood to build a highway, we moved to a white working class neighborhood, which became a Black working class neighborhood in about eight or nine months, that was the start of a real hurtful and



negative experience with schooling. Unbeknownst to me, we were the class that integrated that junior high school, you see, I didn't know that at the time. We were the largest influx of Black students into this particular junior high school. I forget how many of us it was, they had never seen that many Black people in their life (N. M. laughs). We caught hell up there, man I didn't even know why we were catching hell to tell you the truth. I mean, we went up there I guess at what ever age you are when you go to the seventh grade. Everyday it was just some shit.

I remember this one teacher, for some reason I could never remember to take my hat off when I entered the building, it wasn't like I was keeping my hat on to be a wise guy, I just would get into the building and the moment I realized I still had my hat on was when I would see her (NM laughs). I would think oooh man I got this damn hat on, you know. It was just a big deal made out of it and this kind of like, at the time I couldn't figure out what was going on, this condescension and this kind of derisive, talking down to me type thing. Detentions handed out for little or nothing and just this feeling, this feeling they didn't like us very much. Now see, you got to think right, here you are eleven, twelve years old and then you make this move, you come from one environment which is all of your own folks and your peer group, the teachers seem to be supportive of you, and then you go to this other environment and its like you're a foreigner and the feeling is you're not wanted here. It wasn't until the ninth grade that I finally realized what --- you know this was the time when there was a lot of college protest over the Vietnam war and there were riots, and you became more socially conscious. As that



consciousness grew I realized what the deal was, by the time I got to the ninth grade I knew what the deal was (NM. laughs) you know, they didn't want us there. That made for a pretty miserable three years at the school and I kind of half heartedly tried to do some work in school. I got caught up in the usual adolescent socializing thing and so that (learning) was not the priority for me. And so any kind of studying that came out of that was purely my folks, you know, riding me very hard and what little studying or academic work that came out of that was behind their force. We eventually left and went to high school.

There was only one teacher, a Social Studies teacher that I felt I made a connection with in the junior high school. And he seemed to recognize that I had some smarts. Other than that I can't think of any other teacher that I connected with during that entire three years. I was placed in the upper divisions in the tracking systems and I was lazy, I really wasn't interested in doing a whole lot of work you know. Like a lot of teenage guys around you know, I was just trying to get with these girls, drink a little booze and that's about it. That was part of the difficulty but I think the other part of it was this kind of unspoken idea that I didn't belong in those upper division classes anyway. And so I just you know --- I'll give you an example, seventh grade algebra, we had not been prepared in our elementary school for algebra so I started failing it almost immediately and I came after school everyday to try to figure out how to pass algebra. And for whatever reason I wasn't picking it up and I remember feeling like the teacher just sort of gave up. It was like so hell, you're not picking it up and so I just failed it. There was

this one thing that sticks out in my mind, I mean, the only thing this guy could say to me was "we both have the same first name ", I mean, that wasn't helping me learn math. Its funny I saw him years later he became the head of parole in criminal court, I said that about fit. He would never know when I look at him, that is what I think about him (NM laughs). He was screwing me up in math and not helping me, and then now he is down working in the criminal court building where 90% of the people coming before the criminal bar are Blacks and Hispanics. His preparation for this work was gained while at that junior high school. White students didn't need him because they all came from school districts where they were prepared to handle this math. So they were picking it up and they enjoyed the classes, they were loving it. There were two other brothers (Black students) in that class, and one of them did OK, the other did fair, but I didn't think about them for help, I was just thinking about myself flunking this damn course.

I would say socially, 99% of my experience was a happy experience. I don't think the kids were too much focused on race so much until their parents packed up and moved. They moved out of there fast. When we got up there it was our family and another family that lived down the street, we were the only Black families on the street. And no exaggeration, in a year's time that neighborhood was 80% Black, they flew out of there. Those for sale signs went up like it was nobody's business. And see again it was seventh grade, I see all these for sale signs go up but I am not really picking up on it too much. You know little jokes about it, the old man is making jokes about you know, good, I am glad they're leaving (Nick. laughs) and

Deacon Williams, who lived down the street making jokes about property values, and stuff like that. But as kids you know, we played together, we played ball together and before those kids left we played basketball together but I didn't realize that their parents was in a panic. And that was what the deal was, but I didn't feel that from the kids. So, the majority of my problems came from my teachers and administration. I felt like a couple of people including the vice principal always had something to say to me, something out of the way to say to me, needling me. It heated up after the riots because then we had demands for a Black studies program and I was a central figure in that organization effort of having an after school program around Black studies and I think that brought some more heat on me that again, I wasn't really conscious of. That, I believe, was generating more needling. By the ninth grade I figured it out though. They brought teachers aides and advisors and shit into the school after the riots across the country and we had a little riot in Springfield too. And so they brought in teachers aides, you know kids that I knew, their mothers got jobs at the school. It was basically so we wouldn't get to fighting down there. But that wasn't really a big deal, any fights was just a normal thing. We had a fight between a Black kid and a white kid, it was just normal stuff you know like hacking while you were playing basketball or something and then people got hot under the collar and a little fight broke out. It wasn't like any major kinda confrontation of the races between the children. Then when the white people all moved out of the neighborhood then we were all, it was just us hanging together anyway. When the white students left you had the same tenured white faculty, they just supplemented that



faculty with Black people in counselor roles. I don't think we had one Black teacher in that school, not a single Black teacher in that school I am almost sure of it, high school either.

Before we go to my high school experience a word about the tracking system. Me and another Black student were in the class together everytime, that was it. Out of thirty to thirty-three kids we were the only two Black students, no Puerto Rican students in the advanced track. Most of them were tracked at a lower level and it was clear, I mean they were called the dumb classes and by the white students. The middle tier classes were somewhat mixed with white, Black and Puerto Rican students but the lower tiers were glutted with us. Even if the students in the upper tiers performed poorly they believed that they could always do better if they wanted to, it was a psyche job - if you are told you are smart you believe it, and if you are told that you are dumb you will believe it.

I went to what was called Commercial high school. They supposedly trained people for business. It was 60% women and that was the reason I went to that high school. There were four high schools: there was a trade school; Commerce High, which is the commercial high school with the reputation of sending people into business; they had a technical high school, where the emphasis was on math and science; and, then you had a classical high school, where the emphasis was training for college, those were the four choices. Now given my experience in the upper tracks in the junior high school, and my propensity not to work hard, I wasn't interested in going to the classical high school. You had to take Latin you know, and I just wasn't interested in working that hard. I couldn't do math so I



didn't want to go to the technical school, I didn't want to take up a trade, so it was almost a process of elimination (Nick laughed), it was the last choice. My parents couldn't help me with it because they weren't involved with this kind of stuff. I was on my own trying to figure out how to get ahead in the system. And of course, like I said, the fact that there were a lot of girls down there was a motivation to go and it was mostly social, it was more of a social motivation. I went and participated in the college prep program.

High school was kind of fun. They had this principal, another Irishman who was an authentic guy. And its from a kid's eyes, you don't know, I mean you only evaluate situations the way people treat you, the guy treated you decent, you then thought he was a pretty decent guy. In those days I relied a lot on what I call personal intelligence. I knew I had a charismatic kind of personality, I knew how to bullshit people and so with that I could do practically anything I wanted to. You would see me out in the hall when I was supposed to be in class and the principal didn't even say anything. So I just had a good time, of course, I only did about average you know because that's what I was putting down, enough to get by, even though I would stand out in certain classes such as social studies, history and those things that had to do with critical thinking around our social history. There was a couple of things that were significant in all of that; one is how my flight away from work ended up leading me to my life's work. I opted to take a journalism course in the twelfth grade because I was trying to get out of a more difficult English, also in making the choice of going to the Commercial High School, I had to pass typing two years in order to get

out of high school. So those two things together added into the foundation for me to become a journalist and it was an accident. I would often get over by plagiarizing songs. I remember once I had palmed off some Motown song lyrics as original poetry and these white ladies, you know, they were just stumbling around you know. These clever poetic lines were really songs by Marvin Gaye or the Temptations, and it was that kind of a joke. Anyway I ended up in a Journalism class and I loved it. I sort of pursued it as a sideline through out college some years later, and it ended up being the thing that I really enjoyed doing in life.

I was recognized for being smart but it was a kind of hustlers smart, I could get things, I could get out of school when I wanted to and not get in trouble for it. I could you know ---Sweeney, the high school principal, never said anything to me when he saw me not going to class but hanging, or cutting half of the class. This is probably a great testimony to it, because I never could have made this up. The end of the school year they pick everybody for these different categories in the class and they had this category called "alibi king" and that's what the kids picked me as being. I always had a story, you know a line of bullshit and I thought I was just having fun, really you know. Later on it hurt me because I wasn't thinking real deep into becoming a substantial person. It hurt me, that going on your personality, going on your ability to charm people and stuff like that. Later on I had to backtrack and do a lot of hard reading and reading a lot of things I should have read much earlier. At the time I was just having fun.

I think Phil Sweeney was a shrewd politician in the system. I think that he viewed my behavior and others as a type of intelligence that he shared, that he had. He knew that everybody acted up. He was hard on people sometimes and he ran that school with an iron hand. I mean it was a smile, but you did what he said you were going to do. You could hear the teachers beefing about it sometimes. I think he recognized me as having a form of intelligence and I think he thought that later on the substance would catch up with a style. I think he saw that because I enjoyed writing, the substance would come out in the writing. In the analysis of situations he wasn't just shooting from the hip he was really processing the experiences I was having in classes. And so I think, you know, that reflected on substance that he thought would catch up with the style.

My decision to go to college was influenced by several people including one of the more outstanding individuals I have ever met. My daily routine started with a neighborhood woman that encouraged education through her every action. Deacon Williams' wife was my godmother. She was big on education, she was self educated, she had a lot of kids, she read poetry at the table in the morning. Before we would go to school I would go down there and her son, we'd go to school together, she would recite poetry without looking at the book. She was a great inspiration to me as far as really just encouraging you to be an educated person and that was a big factor.

We lived week to week you know, we used to say, I come from a privileged family because the old man brought the food in every Thursday. I always had to work on a lot of jobs and stuff, bought my own clothes, I worked tobacco farms, shined shoes, sold newspapers,



grocery stores and that kind of stuff as a young kid. That was because my dad bought the food and gave us a place to live and you know, we had to get the rest. So that was a big factor in college you know, thinking about college because I was down there bullshitting so much my SAT scores were piss poor and also because of the tenor of the times. They had opened up a lot of opportunities for young Black people. So I figured why am I studying for a test that ain't really gonna factor into it too much anyway. I made enough good grades in the twelfth grade to make that college application look reasonably well. I think I was smack dab in the middle of my class as class rank. I applied to Dartmouth, Amherst College, man, I had big eyes you know, but I didn't realize that in order to go to those places you had to have gone to prep school and have a whole lot of strong SATs and you had to have a very strong academic work ethic. I just figured, hell you know the doors was opening up I can get in these places too. I rode all the way to Dartmouth on a bus, it was cold as hell, rode up there by myself you know, to make a case. I just didn't have the paper, didn't have the paper. So by default I went to WSC which had a support program. They basically said "can you read", I said yeah I can read, "well come on up and go to school then." And so I went up there and I did very well. My class had the largest class of Blacks and Latinos ever to go into WSC, thirty- five students and we all came in through the summer program as a preparation to go into the main first semester.

My folks didn't know anything about selecting a college. They knew that education, going to college was a good idea, as far as the particulars were concerned I had to figure those out. They left it up



to me to figure it out. Now my mother wanted me to , with this amendment to that latter statement, my mother wanted me to go to a two year community college but I didn't want to do that. There was never a time in my life where I thought that I couldn't do any damn thing that I wanted to do. And to me two year community college was small thinking, and I just wasn't doing it. I come from a family where, like a lot of families, the whole objective (of higher education) is to get a good job, alright. My mother wanted me to go to a two year school and get a job down at the post office. I just couldn't understand that thinking but, that to her represented stability. I mean, in a way, I think she was not too sold on this whole college thing, but because of my father's view that this was the way to go, that kind of made her view point a minority view point and so I went to a four year public college. Now that decision was made for me. The private schools that I applied to, which I had no conception of, was my dream of going to a private college.

The nation's top colleges always impressed me - I wanted to go to one, any one of them. There's a preparation in terms of, you know - all I knew was that these schools (the elite private colleges) were famous schools and, ah, big shot schools. Amherst College and Dartmouth College, schools like that, that's where I tried to make application. I just didn't have the preparation, so I went to the state college. They had a support program there, they called it the Urban Education Program and that essentially opened the door. Now I wouldn't have been going there either if they didn't have that support program -basically, that was my only shot at college, it opened the door. My SATs were lousy, low ranking in the class, you know that

wouldn't have added up to admission to a four year college under any other circumstances. Because of the times, and these opportunities were available to us, that's how I got in.

The support program was basically OK, you're in, you know, and you're on your own. They (the support program staff) got us through those registration lines and somewhat of a head start with the summer school (program), which allowed us to get use to college classes and the (campus) environment. They didn't offer much more than that, it wasn't much else. You had to get it and get it wherever. Because I could read well and I could write well and I was good on the paper (the college newspaper), I made good grades up there. I made the Dean's List, I think the first two semesters. I knew how to run my mouth in the classes and bullshit the teachers after class. I made some good friends with the faculty, some very supportive faculty who were a part of that whole liberal psychology of helping so called disadvantaged people and, and it was OK.

My friends and I got high a lot and that turned out to be a bad thing. We smoked a lot of reefer and drank a little booze in high school but then it kind of accelerated in college. It hurt me in many respects and limited my potential. Although I was pretty much able to hold my own even with, ah, indulging in these activities. Our grades did suffer. My friends were flunking out because they, you know, they didn't know how to hustle. Basically they were getting high and weren't going to class and they weren't, you know, talking to the teachers, so most of them ended up flunking out. By the fourth semester, it was the state (Dean of Students and Housing office) that got tired of me and they basically ran me out of the school. They

said you know, it is time to start working on the substance, the days of flash are over. So, they got on to me and I left and went to another state university (a part of the same state system) right up the highway.

My high school charm, verbal skills, my bullshit was exhausted by the fourth term at WSU. They warned me, they told me to step it up a notch, and really dig deep and apply myself - these were concerned substantial educators trying to talk to me this way. My success to that point was being able to read. It was like this, I would read half a book instead of a book or read the cliff notes instead of the book - that kind of thing, that kind of get by mentality - they wanted more from me.

My leaving WSU was due to a combination of factors, personal and academic. It was becoming very clear that I needed to get married at that time and that was the major part of my decision to leave. I got married about six months into my junior year at the university and moved in married student housing.

I lived on campus, in the dormitory, while attending WSU. Due to the force of my personality I was able to become good friends with the administration, the people who ran the dorms, and I was a dorm counselor. My first year was just one party everyday. My first year, I had a Black roommate; a brother from New Bedford, Ma. he was Portuguese Black that I had met during the summer. He was also an Urban Ed student, a member of the summer school program? We roomed together until the college asked me to (leave the college) walk. Yes, he was my roommate for four semesters. I found the students in my dorm to be very friendly; what I didn't realize until later, was



that most of these students came from working class families and a similar background, except for, you know, they were white, they came from communities that were all white, we had very similar working class backgrounds. We had no problems, we played ball together, got high together and had lots of fun.

As I said earlier, the Urban Ed program, I believe, could have saved a lot of us, white and Black students. Retention of students was the theory behind Urban Ed at the time but it wasn't run well, it was just a structure without any guts, without anything inside of it. We were affiliated with that program, it got us into school, it would get us tutors if we needed them, there was a cadre of sympathetic professors that went out of their way to help that student population but that was it. It wasn't very well organized in terms of riding down (insisting on time devoted to study and acceptable behavior) on the students and that caused a lot of kids not to make it. It's like this, You are up there bullshitting and nobody is checking up on you, you just play yourself right out of the whole opportunity and that's what happened to most of the brothers and sisters (African American students).

The Urban Education program failed many students. It provided an open door and left you standing. The program claimed you as theirs --- I imagined they were hoping for successes (degree completion) in order to claim credit - I am not sure if they claimed responsibility for the failures. Let me tell you something, you belonged to Urban Ed as long as you were in school. They mainstreamed us in the sense that you had to do what everybody else did, you had to take the courses that everyone else took but your papers that legitimized your being in



that environment was being affiliated with the Urban Ed Program. They (Urban Education) had an office with a guy, a Greek guy named G. G. who was director, who basically got us out of trouble. As long as you had dark skin, you know, you could not un-affiliate yourself from Urban Ed, that was the deal. Although, to me, it was no more of a label than having black skin. It was the same thing because when people looked at you and you're not generally the kind - you're not the white student that usually went to school there, it carried assumptions that you couldn't shake anyway. So, in a way there wasn't much difference. It was an out in that there was some kind of special attention being given to you.

I would say that overall the institution (WSC) at that time had a commitment to helping minority, so called minority, students get through college but they didn't really know how to help us. A big part of what we needed was somebody to kick us in the ass but that wasn't happening, we were kind of running wild. I would say that the general ethic was that they wanted us to get a college education and many of the teachers did their best to make that happen; I am not talking about giving you easy work, soft grades or anything like that, I am talking about just being after you, just staying after you. The faculty didn't stay after you, they gave you things to do, they encouraged you, but what we needed was some kind of policing. We were young people you know, and the guys in particular needed some policing in terms of somebody who could talk our language, who knew what we were up to, that was missing. G. G., you know, was a Greek from a poor neighborhood but he still wasn't one of us, we could con him. In 1980 they hired K. A. who revolutionized the whole situation and

brought that kind stringent forcing of students to strive for quality, cultivation of themselves, and development of themselves. That didn't happen til 1980, maybe it was a little bit later.

As a student I was never concerned about being an Urban Ed student. I understood that I was going to get mine and nobody was going to --- I mean, I just didn't have any kind of, I would say negativity associated with it being thrown in my way. I participated in the student newspaper and I became a voice through the student newspaper at WSC, even though I was a bullshitter in terms of really becoming a substantial student embracing an authentic educational experience and growth. I still talked a lot of great stuff in those classes and I became recognized as being a person, at least with potential for substance and at times substance showing up. So you know, I just wasn't having - I mean, to me in any situation I was ever in I always knew that we were going to suffer a certain amount of underestimation because of who we are. We as African Americans and Puerto Ricans because those were the two main dark skin groups. We're going to suffer a certain amount of low rating and underestimation but I never - you know I just kicked that shit to the side and kept on, you know. As a person I never once doubted that I wasn't going to get whatever I wanted. Now I don't know where I got that, I must of got it from my father. He did a lot of stuff that was unusual too for his time. "You think about the odds you won't do shit", that's what he use to --- that's what he said you know. And so, you know, Urban Ed to me was - it was the same thing - it was the same thing - yeah, they're gonna say that you can't do this, you know and as soon as they say that I say OK, well let's see.

Many African American and Puerto Rican brothers and sisters applied to WSC, and were accepted as regular students not as Urban Ed students. But again, I think it's synonymous with the same kind of view of them (African American and Puerto Rican students) being affiliated with Urban Ed and the view of limited ability and place in that environment. Urban Ed and ability was connected with the skin color, it was the same thing. Urban Ed was synonymous with Black.

For a long time Urban Ed was synonymous with failure, but the thing is it kept bringing in new classes every year, and at least some of those students graduated. I don't know what their graduation rate was, but I am sure it was really miserable during the time I was there but I had talked to them in recent years and the graduation rate was 50% and they seemed to think that was success. Urban was also synonymous with failure in the sense that most of the students failed. I think to the larger culture it was like they were giving us an opportunity and that was enough, it didn't change until this other guy, an African American, a Doctor of Education, took over the program. Up until 1980 or 81 when he came on the scene, I think the attitude was it was enough just to open the door. Not very much thought was given to the success of the students. That (access) was their missionary bit.

At the university, which also had a support program, I felt like I was completely on my own, I just had to go to those classes and do the best I could. I mean to me, I don't need anybody to help me read my books; I mean, what was undergraduate education, read some books, demonstrate that you know something on an exam or in your class discussions. I didn't need any help with that and I did fairly well.



As far as the support programs, I was affiliated with them automatically but I didn't use them for anything and I didn't need them for anything. The only time I got called in to talk to a counselor was when I kind of dogged it in one of the semesters and ended up with a bunch of incompletes and took my time making them up. They technically turned into F's on the record and then I got called in as if I had failed all those courses when actually I had not. I had this really bummed experience with the head of the program at that time, who basically wasn't even listening to me. I was trying to explain to him that I had these incompletes and I hadn't done the work yet but the teachers were going to change the grades as soon as I got the work in. He wasn't hearing it basically and I had the feeling that he thought I was lying, you know, and that was my experience with the support program. Actually that person was the Chair of the Political Science Department, he was notified by Urban Ed that I had a bunch of incompletes.

When I transferred - when they kicked me out of WSC and I made application and was accepted at MA, a school in the same damn system, MA automatically placed me in a program equivalent to WSC's Urban Ed program. Although I was transferring in with a 3.2 or 3.3 average, I had no control over that placement. I think as an administrative normality I was just put in that program. I did not want a support program nor did I need one, my average was about a B minus when I transferred in --- I guess it was just the official home for so called minority students. It appeared to me that all minority students, all Black students at least, were assigned to this program.



They had no Black students at the time attending as regular students that I knew of, now there probably were some, I just didn't know of any. I mean it is a big school, you know, so there probably were some but I didn't know. My dealing with the support program was for the social aspect. They received copies of your grades and I guess other shit that they weren't entitled to. They had some kind of setup for you to get tutors and I don't know what else. But I just never took advantage, I mean I just didn't think I really needed that. I was trying to figure my way through the system but I didn't really need any help with getting to the administration, you know, I just made my own way at that point and I was able to get my business done. I pretty much structured my own support system or retention program.

In the class room, I made my contribution. Although the faculty at MA did not appear to be as supportive as WSC, I continued to make my contribution. MA faculty did not give the personal attention because there was too many cracks, it was too big. But I pressed my case you know and got to know quite a few professors, some of them, one of them anyway remained my friend up to this very minute. I frequently called him for advice after I graduated. I would call him up when I was in the news business, he was an expert on federal judiciary and ah court systems. I would call him up when I was covering court for my newspaper and use him as a source. I often think about teachers, J. C. who became the President of a Historically Black College, she was one of my teachers. Professor J.C. and the other professor mentioned earlier, were real helpful and supportive of me. It wasn't like a whole bunch of them (helpful individuals on campus), it was my own initiative finding those people.

Again, I was my own advocate. I met others including a Black Associate Dean of Students and, I almost forgot about him, he was a big factor in helping to support the idea that you could do whatever you want. He was supportive of that idea and there was a few of us that he talked to; and then there was another Black woman, in addition to Professor J.C., she was some kind of an Associate Dean in the Dean of Students office. She was a black Portuguese woman, she was also very supportive, she was a friend of J. C's. They would talk about the way it really was, do you know what I mean. I mean they wouldn't front on the system, they would tell you straight up that these whites weren't for you, you had to make your own way and that it was possible to make a way.

In one incident that sticks out in my mind, I will never forget it, a few of us got chosen to be a part of something called some kind of intern program. We were placed in offices on campus in order to get some kind of job experience. I was a political science major and my intern partner was in administration. So we got sent over to Human Services - so we're over there in an area that we knew nothing about and they ain't got us doing shit right, but getting that check every week. My partner is asking, look man we're here everyday and we ain't doing nothing, what are we suppose to be doing here? I said, we are suppose to be getting that check right, that's what we're suppose to be doing man. I mean, how much are they going to teach us anyway, do you know what I mean? We went through that experience - they had us going to these meetings, you got to remember you know I am 21 years old at the time so a lot of this stuff that they're talking at these meetings is going way over my head. I didn't know what in the hell

they were talking about. But I do remember this incident and I remember the lady who said it, she is still working at MA. My partner wasn't there that day so I am sitting in on this boring ass meeting and this woman says something about an Affirmative Action Plan and then somebody brings up the Internship Program, so I, you know I wake up out of this half sleep that I am in just as this woman is saying "but the Internship Program is the same thing as the Affirmative Action Plan", she caught herself and looked at me. When she looked at me the way white people often looked at Black people, you know dogs don't understand English well, but I knew exactly what she meant even though, maybe, she didn't think I did because I was a 21 year-old. What she meant was they constructed the Internship Program to satisfy some outside pressures, political pressures. We weren't meant to learn anything, we were meant to represent some numbers and that was a metaphor for the entirety of the situation and really the entirety of my attitude that it was all a hustle and that was that for undergraduate school. I came to see her years later when I was heading a MA program, another public relations effort by the institution to soothe the rumbling natives. And it occurred to me when I was looking at her that it was the same woman who had said that at that meeting twenty years ago. And at that point when I was talking to her in this recent date, I remembered that and she was trying to hustle me then, and she was in fact hustling me then. And that again, you know served as, you know another metaphor for the situation in its entirety, and what this whole process of education really means in terms of authentic cultivation and contribution of African Americans in America, we're only as good as their next meal.



Many factors influenced my initial and later determination in pursuing and eventually earning a college degree. I think that the support of my godmother and her emphasis on education and her pride in what I was doing was a big factor. I think also my immediate family, the fact that they were proud of me doing it. I knew that I was doing something, I didn't really understand all the importance of it. The other thing I think is that there was some white people in positions of authority, as faculty and administrators, who really came off to me as sincerely wanting to see me get this, I think that was a help. When I had nothing else to rely on, my hustling mentality sustained me. I viewed my hustling attitude as very positive, allowing me to cut through a lot of the red tape. I could get in the back door of the financial aid office to see people who could make decisions, in order to get things done - you know, get those things done that doesn't usually seem to be made in your favor. You had to be able to get in there and talk, advocate for yourself. I also believed that my reading and writing skills served me well. I had a knack for what I would call contextual intelligence. I could take a piece of information and put it in the context of my own experience and it would mean something to me and that got me over in under-graduate school. It served me well when I was a graduate student at Columbia and Harvard. Really, my hustling skills was all I had going for a long while, and I guess I relied on that when there was absolutely no need. Later, I found out that there were other people, psychologists and social scientists who actually called that a kind of intelligence,



this kind of contextual understanding of life through your own experience. That was the kind of confirmation that I didn't need but I took it anyway.

Many factors served to interfere with my desire to complete my undergraduate education, they were definitely impediments. These negative factors included my own laziness; messing around with drugs; people like the lady that made the comment about the internship program and the affirmative action effort, you know that institutional bullshit, which clearly suggested that we were just used and were not to be validated as human beings. Getting married made it more difficult, but it wasn't a negative thing, it was a positive.

After undergraduate school I worked for several human services agencies for about nine years. I continue to see and understand issues within a certain context. When in undergraduate school I studied under an African American Political Science teacher who was in a purgatory between his doctorate and full fledged professorship, and he left me with that kind of seeing of things and I think the ability to articulate that. I mean he helped me with that kind of conception and articulation of the world. And so when I did these social service gigs, I always saw all the angles on a thing. The fact that I experienced being hustled by the institution helped me to see city politics in a clearer way when I got into the social services field. And you know, more or less it was those same skills, employing those same skills to run a neighborhood organization or a neighborhood council. My approach (hustling and getting over), which was really refined in college, was an important asset in my activities following college. I used those skills in every job that I held. Harmonizing

situations that I found myself in when dealing with my co-workers and working hard to understand the personalities of those that interviewed me for jobs was key in my ability to get work. Because I messed around with drugs, I use to change jobs pretty regular, so in ten years I had about ten jobs. You know, essentially it was getting people to validate what was positive about you and disregard the negative things about you.

After eight years or maybe closer to nine years, of shaking off narcotic habits and changing jobs, I finally realized that I had to let that go. When I let that go, I assessed what I had to offer, what did I have to offer? I had the force and the attraction of my personality to harmonize situations and an ability to write. I decided to press down on the journalism and that's when I started my journalism career in earnest. I started with a community newspaper, I went from a community newspaper to a local daily, and with the new clarity of leading a sober life, with that new clarity, there was no going back. If I wasn't drinking I couldn't stand out in front of the liquor store, so I had to do something else, and I did, I pursued journalism in earnest and I just pressed down on those two skills and progressively I got better and better jobs with newspapers, and you know, eventually I went to two of the best graduate schools in the world in order to improve my skills. You know, it was still employing the same kind of baseline hustle mentality, seeing it for what it was, but knowing there was no going back.

My decision to get two graduate degrees was really made as a way to stay off the street. It was like, OK what am I going to do now, I am not hanging out anymore, I can't really --- you know --- relate to

people in my old neighborhood the way that I related to them in the past, I had to move on. So I moved on to where I could make a living, make a living newspapering. Yes, all those environments were alienating and strange. At the same time I had a family, I had children and my thing (drug and alcohol problem) was OK now. I am going into this thing (journalism), I am going to take what I can get out of it in order to give my family a living so they can have a life, a quality life you know. That was the motivation behind pursuing a graduate program in journalism. I wanted to know everything, test it out you know. Okay, now I am in you know, I am in Columbia's School of Journalism. Immediately I'm getting bullshit from some, you know, low class white trash, work a day journalist who is coming in as an adjunct (professor). I just got what I could get out of that situation and parlayed that situation into an interview with the CSM (one of the nation's leading and most respected publications) and then on the last day, graduation day - I sat on that information right up until the day we got those diplomas and I sprung it on all those characters in that ivy league J school. They asked "what you gonna do?" I would say in a matter of fact manner, I am going to the Washington Bureau of the CSM and I would watch their eyes bulge. You know, I parlayed the situation, got some skills there, made some good contacts with teachers while at Columbia, that was helpful. I kept on, went into big time journalism in Washington and did it for 3 1/2 years. That was a strange environment, they had some really low class racist bullshit going on in the newsroom, primarily stemming from underestimation of abilities. That didn't stop me, I was still parlaying all of that into getting my point of view into the



paper and a point of view of the people out front, getting front page stories, getting prime assignments, using it all, using it all.

I got laid off from there, at the same time I had started moving into the direction of education, another advance degree. I took that (admission into Harvard University) and bankrolled it into another advanced degree. My thinking was improvement for my family and for myself you know, that was the thing all the time, becoming more and more substantial. When I first went to Columbia, I realized, damn, no wonder they don't let us in here, they had eleven libraries, they had books that you just wouldn't imagine - all those books, rare volumes, and stuff. Then I started to realize that African Americans have a tradition of scholarship. We're talking about humanities you know. I found out you know, that Pushky was a Black man, the poet laureate of Russia was a Black man. You know this bugged me out, so I was gassed up and kept on going. They were throwing down that parochial small minded foolishness of America but the whole universe of things was opening up to me. That gave me things to consider, so I thought, well hell, I had better come back to this graduate thing because this thing, you know, really was good. So, I went from Columbia to the CSM, where every story was an education and then I got it in my mind I would go to Harvard, and I went. That opened up a whole new universe but I was already primed. And then, with this universal perspective, realizing that the Moors brought the light to Europe, that mathematics and sciences came out of North Africa and Ethiopia, all of that stuff just jelled. It was all a growth thing all the way through, parlaying the so called negative and small into enlarging my situation.



I would tell any African American male considering a four year college education that reading is the fundamental skill; I would cite the ancient and modern history of examples of art, and birth right, to cultivation of ourselves in academics, and our place in academics; I would tell them not to bullshit themselves, that being a player, and using substances will destroy, cause irreparable loss and you can't regain lost time - I was lucky, with today's laws, I would have been thrown in jail for life for doing more, no less. I would also tell that young man that you need to press down on the cultivation of yourself and helping your family, you owe it to your family to do something with yourself; I would say that there are no discounts in life, no shortcuts, you just have to get with it; there is no such thing as individual, we don't live for ourselves, everything you do is in relation to everyone else; if you fuck up you're gonna mess it up for somebody else. And now, today, I can send them to people on a couple of campuses that can help, they can make a difference. We talk the same language, and they have connections. I would finally say to this young brother and all others, that the university is theirs, they own it, and they have unique and valuable gifts to give to the world and they can succeed, despite all the hype about what we can't do.

### Profile of Marion P.

The profile is of a municipal department head who grew up in the Southwest and earned his undergraduate degree from Lamar University. He was raised in a two parent family household with his older brother and two older sisters. Marion, now in his mid 30s, is single and resides in the Northeast.

From my very first memory, it was ingrained into me that -- not really ingrained -- what was taught and expected of me was: one, I would go to church every Sunday; two, I would go to college; and three, I would obey my parents. Those were the three central themes that always remained consistent from day one to this very minute. Now that I 'm in my thirties, I still go to church every Sunday, I did graduate from college, and I still obey my parents -- (M. J. smiled) -- to a certain degree. I think a lot of that was taught because of their values, and a lot of things they instilled in us was derived from their belief in God. It was always understood that I was going to college and that's how they prepared our lives; elementary school, junior high, and high school, we always were prepared to go to the next level. There are other differences in my life than others in terms of how I chose my college. My father was a career military person. There was a constant involvement with other groups of people living all over the world and this country, so I was very comfortable in a white setting or a Black setting. I chose a college that happened to be 20% minority, which included - out of 16,000 students a very small number were African Americans. It never dawned on me to

look at an all black college or an all white college; it dawned on me to look at the program I wanted and the environment that I wanted that would help accomplish that.

I am getting ahead of myself - my parents always taught me to prepare for the next step. They were extremely important in my life and they continue to be very significant. And there were a number of other people, and they are a part of what I like to call my extended family. It was that extended family that Black people take great pride in telling anyone listening that all family members are important - we had cousins, uncles, aunts and many other relations that were given the status of family because of the trust and respect my parents had for them. To this very day there are a number of people that were part of my life that I still communicate with. So, they played a big role in lives wherever we lived.

I have two sisters, a half sister and a whole sister - I hope that's correctly phrased. My half sister did not live with us - she had to leave school due to raising her family. There were different circumstances influencing her perception of college - she was running back and forth and cooking and raising kids, so it was different. My sister was raised with me, she went to school (college), the first year she went to school in El Paso then she went to N. T. State. Since she was away from home I did not know the experiences that she went through; she made it seem like fun. It had no bearing on what I thought (of college). We (as a family) never communicated very much about that (our experience of college). It was something that we understood was the next step of life; we all had to obtain (a college education) that.



My father did not finish school until he retired from the military and I was already out of school, if I'm correct. All I can remember about my mother going to school was that we had to go pick her up at night. Dad would pile us in the car and we would all go pick her up at night. It was just something that we thought she had to do - it was an important lesson (for me and my younger sister), my mom and adult sister going to college and raising a family - nothing could have interfered with or prevented those two women from climbing the next rung of the ladder. She (my mother) started college and completed two years before she got married - she got married but she did not give up her dream, she went back (after we were old enough to start elementary school) and finished her degree. Again, all of this determination and drive was downplayed, we never discussed any of our college experiences. Never! Never! I don't think that they even realized that I went to a college down the street from the beach. I don't think it even dawned on any of us to discuss our college experiences, it was something that we were going to do and we did it, we did it differently and we did it separately. Again, my decision to go to college was very simple; you were told you were going to high school and you were going to college by your parents there was no if and, and buts here. This (college) was the next progression in life, and probably you realized that you could make a choice, you didn't know better, and we were definitely not bad enough to question them (our parents). You understand that it was a part of growing up, you go to high school, you go to college and you get a job which is just how life works. That's just how life works. And when you got into school (college) all of us started thinking about advanced degrees and

my parents would say "we picked the first one, the second one is on your own." I think that if they had ingrained in us or instilled in us that we had to get a graduate degree I would have got an advanced degree immediately following my undergraduate education. We just didn't know better, I mean, when you thought something from age 5 to 6 there's no questioning, there's nothing to question, you get up every morning and you put a tie on. Who are you to tell me to wear a tie. That's what society had determined so who are you to wake and say I don't want to wear a tie today. Bottom line is we very rarely tested what society had determined. My parents, very loving parents, prescribed what was expected, no more no less, and we complied, no more no less.

Church consumed our entire life, it was where we found meaning. You were everything that you were supposed to be in that church. You ushered, you sung, you did the Christmas program, you did the Easter program, Sunday School, BYU, we did it all, right in church. That's how we were taught, it's very simple. My peer group at an early age was from church. No question, we had three sets of friends, church friends, church friends, and church friends. Now that I recall, we did have a fourth set, friends of our parents and their kids. These people were not members of our church, they worshipped at other churches and just happened to be friends of my parents.

My early education did offer some very unusual opportunities. I'm one of the few people you will meet that went to school in two different countries and three different states before I was in third grade. This, I believe, made me very adaptable, very knowledgeable for a third grader. In the third grade I could talk about and compare

my experience of life in Germany, Alabama, New Jersey and Texas. In certain instances I had as much knowledge as my teachers, in other cases more than my teachers --- most of them not knowing what the hell I was talking about. This experience, I believe, made me very adaptable and very impatient with my classmates and some of my teachers. We covered so little in most classes.

I completed all of my Kindergarten through third grade ---five schools in three years. I don't remember anything about my 4th grade experience. I don't remember if it was a bad year or a good year, I just don't remember. Perhaps that was because of my connection with the military, we were constantly moving. I mean, being a military brat you really didn't make lasting relationships. The fifth grade was the first time I had attended school with non-military kids throughout the entire year -- the neighborhood (non-military) kids and military kids went to the same school for the entire year, that was exciting. Three of the kids from my fifth grade class, Becky Melendez, Yvette Davis and Jose, we were all military brats and we went to fifth grade and right on to high school together. Beyond that I remember nothing about my elementary school experience.

I hated high school, I hated it! I went to a predominantly white high school with many problems. I didn't like it because that was when I first understood that I had experienced racism. I recall one of the administrators expressing concern over Black students eating together in the high school cafeteria. He was an asshole. He wanted to know why did all the Black students sit together. Well, when you have a school of 5,000 and only 300 Blacks in the school --- now be mindful, my class had 100 Black students, and the other three



classes had the remaining 200 Black students --- they just might feel a need to feel faceless or disappear in the crowd. Anytime you have that many students from the same neighborhood, you just might discover that out of the 300 or so Black students, many were childhood friends and others were related. It was dumb to ask why we were sitting together. I said well, most of them went to all Black neighborhood grade schools together and just got used to the idea of sitting together, perhaps, just as white students avoid sitting with the Black students. Why wouldn't we sit together? I told him that I would give him a few of the reasons why I thought we found time to enjoy the company of each other and they were, as I recalled: 1) many of us knew each other and went to grade school together; 2) a number of us were military kids and had grown up together; and, 3) white students didn't welcome us with open arms. This man's comment was really one of the dumbest things -- that's when it dawned on me that there are some really big assholes making decisions about you. That's when it dawned on me how bad things were. That's when I began to understand what white liberals were about, displaying their guilt for what had occurred during slavery and the civil rights era, and their desire to try to make amends for the society. That was all a bunch of bullshit and precisely why we started the Unified Student Association at that high school. These dumb ass liberals still were not teaching history correctly, still were not allowing people to be themselves, still harboring the mentality that we were not college material, so we should look to becoming a fireman - bullshit. They should have been telling all of us, Black and white students alike, that we have the genetic make up and capacity to learn --- some of us actually do

learn, rejecting the counselors recommendation for shop courses and the administrators conveying the message that high school offers the education that will get us through life. Again, it was stupid!

I have absolutely zero friends from high school. I communicate with no one from my high school. I have never considered going back for a High School reunion. My experience with the stupidity of my high school administrators turned me off. It was not my first exposure to racism, it was my exposure to that degree or level. You must remember that I lived in Alabama as a very young child and anyone that has lived in Alabama experienced (MP laughed and said "pick any state") racism. It was the first to that degree, or perhaps I was older and smarter and could understand what was going on. My use of racism and stupidity should not be interpreted as being synonymous. I view racism as something designed to hinder a person, stupidity is something when the son-of-a- bitch is not thinking, and does not understand the consequences of that behavior. So in this case they are not synonymous.

In my earlier comment I believe I used racist when referring to my high school administrator, he wasn't being a racist he was being an asshole and I apologize for saying that he was racist. He didn't really understand what he was doing, he really didn't, he didn't understand why black students were sitting together. Well, did anyone ask why all white kids sit together. His response to that was, "well there's more of them so, of course, they would sit together. This man, no doubt, viewed himself as a liberal thinker but he continued the business of making us (Black students) feel as though we were defective and deficient for having lunch together, and the same

behavior was healthy for white students. He just didn't get it. So, in my opinion, that was stupid. And to think that he's an educator, that's frightening, it is really frightening.

I should explain what I was attempting to communicate when I said that my first exposure to that degree of racism was in high school, with some background information. At that time, that's when all the Blacks were the running backs. We were valued only for our running, jumping and shooting (football, track and basketball) abilities. The lack of understanding of our needs as Black students, and the callous disregard for our requests resulted in our effort to organize a Black Student Association. The high school administrators and teachers wanted to know why did we need a Black Student Association, stating that "you are all students." But we are different, you are telling us that we have to go to certain classes, we can't suggest courses that should be taught, we are told that we are dumb when we object to courses depicting Black people as happy slaves and white people as benevolent intelligent caretakers, or we have to behave in a certain manner, but the white students don't. So those are the areas that I speak of when I say the first time that I faced racism. That was really the first that I realized that I had an opportunity to fight it. Remember, this was the first time I had ever gone to school with whites like the kids in my high school, my experience was with white kids from poor working class families and some military kids. A whole bunch of whites, most middle class and rich kids. It was great, I learned so many things that I probably would never have learned, how to be disobedient, how to be rude, and how to curse out teachers and not get in trouble. That was one of the



first things and one of the most interesting things that I picked up. You could actually curse a teacher and not get into trouble. It was far from what was permitted on a military base and for that matter, at junior high school. You were probably in a classroom with an officer's wife, so you didn't try that. I had never seen any shit like that before. That was funny, the kid just cursed the teacher out and nothing happened. It was also the first time I had seen fights in school - a kid threw a chair at another kid and they thought it was cute. It was amazing, my high school experience was truly amazing. I don't think I walked away with school pride (MP laughed). In other respects my high school years were very good years, it was the period when I discovered girls.

My church life was so wonderful back then (high school years), I was very active in our region, our state, my church social life was wonderful. High school was what I did during the day, Monday through Friday. We had an unbelievable Saturday, Sunday and evenings. Those years were great. Don't forget, we discovered girls during that time, that was very important, particularly in a town where there weren't that many Black girls, it was interesting. There was some cross dating but I didn't, I wouldn't. I still have a great disdain for that. Please keep in mind that I never said I discovered girls in high school, I said that I discovered girls during my high school years. I believe that I only dated one girl attending my high School. I dated girls from the other high schools, Black high schools or girls from my church.

I strenuously objected to cross race dating then and I do now. The exact same problem I had with it then I have with it today. The

difference now is that I am more sophisticated with my reasons now. The answer then was how could you date someone who's ancestors enslaved us. Regardless of what they say and do, they have always had it ingrained --- they have always been taught that we are inferior, I can't fuck (I find that too confusing to deal with) with that. My answer now is the exact same thing, with the added genuine concern of how can you subject a child to a more racist society. This society is so racist that it ain't funny. How can you subject a child, who will always look Black, to spend half the time being Black and the other half being white? I am not saying that it can't be done successfully, I am only asking, how can you subject a child to that? I think you should also remember that the bottom line is regardless of who I am and what I do, they have always been taught that I am inferior to whites. How can I tolerate marriage to someone who at one point was taught that, regardless if they still believe it or not, they were taught this. I believe that the majority, white men and women, still believe in their superiority to Blacks (MP laughs and comments "their superiority to all non-Europeans").

I wrestled in high school. The wrestling team was small and the racial mix was different than other school teams and groups. We had a very evenly mixed wrestling team with three or four Blacks, three or four Latinos and three or four whites. There were no more than twenty-four wrestlers on a team. The wrestlers formed social groups based on grade level rather than team membership. I socialized with one or two people, but the bottom line was that we didn't have the same values. We weren't taught the same things. I had no time to hang-out and plan to go to the movies on Saturdays, that was a church

social day for me. Sunday was truly a church day for me, it was a religious day. So the values were different, to this day I rarely hang out with people who share different values than I do. The male bonding thing didn't exist, not with me.

I was a very good student, I was a very motivated student, I got along well with most of my teachers. Although I was a student who became bored very quickly, I never missed very many school days. If I was bored I would go to sleep, I wasn't one of these students who would cause trouble. I had a 3.2 or 3.3 (GPA) in high school, I wasn't a dumb student, my parents instilled hard work in us. I mean, we didn't bullshit at home. There was none of that business of them asking "do you have homework tonight" and you saying no, if they asked a second time, you would be wise to create a homework assignment. I also had to maintain good grades because of eligibility requirements to continue wrestling and stay in the band. So, I didn't have problems with the teachers, I wasn't dumb enough to pick a fight with a teacher. If you think about how I was taught from a military standpoint, to respect authority, and from a biblical standpoint, to respect my elders, it is clear why I would have no trouble with school rules and requirements. I may have talked back once or twice when I found out that you could get away with it but I was usually very (compliant). My mother was also a school teacher in the system and they all knew each other. Given my background and my parents outlook, it wasn't one of my brighter ideas to cause trouble in the classroom. I happened to have had a good relationship with most of my teachers. I must say that I was aggressive in approaching to get whatever I needed to succeed. It was clear to me that they had well defined



responsibilities and functions as teachers and so did I as a student, my parents stressed that from our early grades. I was always taught that you approach people for whatever you need and believe that they have some responsibility to assist. My parents didn't teach us to be shrinking violets. I made my teachers approachable, because everything that I wanted I went after. Dinner conversations at my house was not very quiet, there were no shrinking violets at my house.

I will now focus on the college selection process. This is going to be the shortest answer that you have heard from anyone. There were one or two stipulations that my parents imposed; they said that you must go a driving distance of at least six hours in order to prevent my mother from driving there every weekend; you must stay in the state of Texas for college because two other family members were in college. It was a very simple process, we pulled out a Texas map and found the furthest point from El Paso going East with a four year college that had a communication or oceanography program. Oceanography was my first choice but you had to take calculus and I hated it. Lamar University was approximately a seventeen hour drive from El Paso and they offered both programs. That was the selection process. It was a very simple process, we looked up the (three) Texas colleges East of El Paso that offered oceanography and communications and determined the distance. It was that simple. It took me all of one hour. I went into the bedroom came out and told my mother that I was going to Lamar University. She asked where is it and I told her the driving distance and time, and my dad said if that's what you want then fine.

I picked Lamar University because three colleges offered oceanography and communication and one college was too close and I hated Texas A & M. My parents supported my choice. They never got involved, they gave me certain stipulations and said make your decision. Our parents taught us to make decisions and live with our decisions, consequences or benefits of those decisions. They never taught us to be quitters. Once you made your mind up you did it. We didn't concern ourselves with such things as cost and entrance requirements, we were satisfied that our preparation, determination and resourcefulness would get us to the next level. It was just that simple, no scientific method to this madness.

Lamar U was where I became a man. Let me see, what is the best way to discuss my college experience. I recall the two guys that I spent a fair amount of time with when I first arrived on campus and they introduced me to campus life, their campus life. Jose and Ray (they were three or four years older than MP) introduced me to college campus life. Jose, a football player from Houston, Texas, was flunking out, so he had to attend summer school, the session before I entered. Ray was just transferring from TSU as an engineering major. Ray was a very strange individual who was from Galveston - he was definitely a sick mind. Ray and Jose had about as much command of the English language as a rock. They knew slang, so they were cool, they were also older, more experienced and streetwise. These two characters introduced me to my first experience of college social life. I wasn't a drinker or druggie but I loved to be in the company of girls. They knew lots of girls and enjoyed being around girls, was about all we had in common. We also had two other common interest,

the three of us enjoyed eating and sleeping. I attended classes religiously, they attended class when they got out of bed. Jose had another difficult semester and flunked. I maintained slightly better than a B- average in all of my classes except English, where I earned a C my first semester. Ray, the Engineering student, prided himself in being able to get through college without studying or going to class. He would invest only that amount of time in study and review to earn a C. Occasionally Ray would lose his head and study a little longer than he had planned and get a B or an A on an exam, which would really upset him. He would argue that the extra time studying was poor planning on his part, he only needed a C not a B or A. In my spare time I would do Jose's homework and spend more time with their girlfriends than they did. My first semester was wild, it was different.

Academically, Lamar U. was an above average school. After my first semester, and with a little gentle persuasion from my parents (MP laughs) I clearly understood why I was there. My college experience allowed me to be around other Black students in large numbers -- my entire dorm was Black. I had never seen anything like that in my life. We were so different, freshmen, all freshmen --- smart ass punks, we knew it all, we were going change the world because we knew how. Well, there were forty-one of us, only seven graduated. It was different, very different, it was fun and I enjoyed the experience. It taught me more about life and living than I could have ever imagined. The fellows in my dorm took me to more parties and clubs than the law should have allowed. It was amazing, it was



great, the social life was great. At the end of my first semester I ended up with a 2.6 or 2.7 grade point average.

In the second semester of my first year I became involved in student government and that is when I really started taking school very seriously. I became very serious about my own education. I got my G.P.A. up to 3.5 or 3.6.

I worked, had a job a little, part time work-study job in the student center. It was during the second semester of my freshmen year that the skills my parents taught me, especially how to be disciplined, took hold. I did no courting, no creeping as we called it, before 11:00pm. There was a student by the name of John and we lived everyday, Monday thru Friday to hear "Book um Danno". That was the only time that we were able to watch T.V. The other guys would stop watching television around 11:00pm and John and I would be leaving the library about then, just in time for Hawaii 5 - 0. Granted, it was not that great of a show, and there should be more culturally uplifting things that you should live for while in college. But "Book um Danno" was the highlight for me from Monday through Friday (MP laughs).

My second semester of college represented the time that my blackness (heightening awareness of race) really started for me. My college was about 21% minority and 79% Caucasian. During my entire stay at LU I was assigned to an all Black dormitory. The school placed Black students together in a dormitory because they decided that should be done and it was best. Black students had no input. It was a racist decision by a racist administration, I hasten to add that it was also a racist school. The year I started, the KKK youth

chapter was thrown off campus, this was in 1981. They would hold the KKK business meeting and rally on campus every year. Of course, the Klan was all over the state of Texas then. All Black students were sent to certain dorms, and all Caucasian students were sent to certain dorms and if they had to mix the two groups in some dorms, Blacks were on the third and fourth floors and Caucasians were on the first and second floors. It was a very simple system, it is what I would call institutionalized racism and everybody knew that. I know you find it difficult to believe, but to answer your question once again, no! No one in my dorm (during MP's stay) was of a different color, period! The dorm was 100% Black. And it was the design, intent, and plan of the administration.

In my junior year I was elected to the Setzer Center Student Governing Board, I was the chairman. That was the governing body for all student organizations. It had professors, staff and students on it. We met monthly to discuss various rules --- this was the governing body that pretty much had all the student fees in it. I was also elected to the Residence Hall Association (RHA) and served as the President. I probably was one of the more radical students holding an elective student office. I believe that I was a very smart radical student leader. I wasn't one of those radical students who was simply causing trouble, but I did make life uneasy for the school's administration. I tried to become familiar with the rules, things in the dorms that needed repairing, and past lies told by the administration. I recall that once we had no fire extinguisher in the dormitory. Each residence hall head had twenty fire extinguishers in their rooms and none in the hallways, because people would fire them

off. I was the type of person who would call the fire department and tell them that I had notified the school that the dorms did not have fire extinguishers in the hallways and they (school administration) would write me back stating this is not true, the extinguishers are in the hallways. I would ask the fire marshal to make an unannounced visit to the dorms. I kept the school fined. Once we found that the sprinkler system was not working, we notified the school in an attempt to try and work with them. It took them about six months to finally say we don't know what's wrong. It's great when you know the fire people and they have confidence that you have a serious complaint. We called the fire department and they checked sprinklers throughout the school. The fine was substantial --- that's the kind of person I was, very radical. All students, Black and white, would vote for me. They knew that I was concerned about issues that affected all students I could care less if the fees went up. Because if you're dead from a fire or dead from neglect, it didn't matter what the damn fees were, you wouldn't be paying them. I could count on support from most students across groups and differences; fraternities, sororities, school clubs and many faculty supported me. I believed that if people knew and understood my views they would support me, and they did.

I didn't run for Student Government Association president because I did not want to be bothered with the busy work. I felt as though I would have more autonomy and could do more for students as the RHA president than student body president. The student president had to keep office hours, and I had to work a real job, for pay (MJ laughs). The student body president had to answer to the vice president for student affairs, whom I thought was racist and an idiot.



I say that because he was the one who condoned a number of the negative behaviors that went on in the dormitory, such as separating the races, non action on the faulty sprinkler system, and requiring fire extinguishers to be kept in the dorm managers office; he was the one who came out publicly and said that nine Black faculty members was sufficient and suggested the school should slow down; he could be counted on for such idiotic and racist bullshit. I wasn't going to put up with it. I was also graduating that December. The student that was eventually elected student body president was a very good friend. I supported her, told everyone, including faculty and administration that she was not as radical as I am so she will do fine. She ended up being much more radical and defiant than I was. They really got it stuck to them (MP paused and laughed), and you know what they didn't know how to deal with her politeness as she kicked them in the ass. She was great, she was just great.

I enjoyed my academic career there, it went very well, it taught me a lot about hard work and discipline. My relationship with three of professors to this very day is very good. Dr. K, Dr. B, Dr. H, I count as true friends. In fact, I normally go back every other year or so and speak in one of their classes. It was a great experience, a great experience. I wouldn't trade my college experience for a new life time. To this very day I will go back and students will say "how did you pass Dr. B's class?" I tell them that Dr. B is a wimp now. It was a great experience. If Harvard can be that much fun more people would come out with better attitudes. My academic experience there was unbelievable, good professors, hard working professors, serious professors, it was great, it was down right great. They

busted your butt though, they made you work. People did not perceive Lamar as a great school, after engineering Lamar University was just another college. The professors there really challenged you and worked the hell out of you. The bigger the challenge the better it was, I enjoyed that. The college that I was in, the college of communications, was what I called a midterm and finals college. They only gave midterms and finals, I enjoyed that. I am not a big person on being tested every time you turn around. For me, Lamar provided an excellent education.

In response to your question, there were many positives as well as negatives that I experienced during my years at Lamar University. The positives included: 1) the discipline that was instilled in me to study and maintain my grades, 2) the negative things that occurred allowed me to be resilient and to rebound as demonstrated in my running for office, wanting to make a difference, those are the things, the negative things that existed that I wanted to change; 3) the fact that it was practically a bi-racial school, very few schools, in my experience are bi-racial, most of them are multi ethnic schools -that was very interesting; and, 3) the success I had within my own race, which at times is very difficult due to our many negative experiences in trusting - I was able to go to my race and say "as students all of us have the same needs regardless of where we are from and what our goals are, that was very positive. My negative experiences included 1) racism; 2) the good old boy network, which served to exclude Black faculty and administrators; 3) the lack of vision on the part of the administration; and, 4) we didn't win all of our football games (MP laughs), that was negative.

I would tell any African American male seeking my advice on an undergraduate college two things, don't go based on the current financial situation at that school, and to go depending on what he wanted to major in. If he was interested in engineering or liberal arts I would tell him to go, I would tell him not to go if he wanted the sciences. If he wanted to go for the environment I would tell him not to go. So it depends on what he wanted. If he wanted to understand who he is as an African American male, I would tell him to go to Howard University. I always tell my nieces and nephews if they choose to go to Lamar I would pay for it, but it may not be in their best interest.

I gained a tremendous amount of knowledge while in college that continues to be helpful. Discipline and working with people are the two things I probably value the most. I remember how much my organizational communication class helped me in politics, in terms of how to look at the political structure. I know that the foundation was shaped by my parents with the discipline and respect that they taught me to show for others. The combination has helped, coupled with the fact that I have moved extensively as an adult, has taught me how to utilize these skills. There is no book knowledge that I can think of that has helped me along the way as much as my role in student governance and my parents teachings on how to deal with people, how to work together, how to be a team player, so those were the things that I learned. It was all people skills. And those skills certainly include working with all groups.

I think the answer to your question as to why African American males do so poorly in terms of degree completion is closely related to



the lack of direction at home. I would not say a single parent family is any worse than a dual parent family, it all stems from what is taught at home and the values that are taught at home. Unfortunately the mentality which is instilled in our race is that we should always go about looking for the immediate and not the long term. What made our race so great was the fact that we are resilient and are fighters. We need to start biting the bullet more than allowing the bullet to eat at us. Our teens need to say "this summer I will not have a summer job, I will be broke the first two months of the semester because I am going to do that free internship to put my foot in the door." Often we will sit there and say that we can't afford something, we need to look at all the things that are available and cost next to nothing. We should stop allowing the media to say a governmental agency is making a cut therefore poor inner-city kids will not have money to be able to go to college. Your hopes, future, desire should not be based on some well-intending white liberal reporter. Just because a cut is being made does not mean that you can not borrow the money. These are the long term sacrifices we must make to be successful, and we don't. I think some good research is needed on the history and experience of Black folks that needed financial aid to finish their college and succeeded through part or full time jobs and loans as compared with the success of those who went to college and did not need money do to federal and state assistance programs.

Financial aid is of great value, creating opportunity for many. But we still see many Blacks not getting financial assistance because of their lack of understanding of the system, failure to explore all options and believing newspaper reports or the advice of neighbors

rather than investigating. There was a lady in my building, with a son attending Union College in N. Y. State, who refused to fill the forms out because she thought the government was being too intrusive into their lives for the little bit of financial aid they received. I asked how much money are you receiving? They received 80% of his college education, damn and they only wanted to know where you live, what are your bills and how much is your income. Isn't that unbelievable, the guy that sold me my TV wanted more damn information than that and I was giving him money. My sister entertained thoughts of taking her boys out of school, her two sons are in college, the youngest child is in high school, her husband was laid off and received unemployment, and she worked at a store, can you imagine that she, a college graduate would give up without investigating. I told her that something tells me that if you complete the financial forms correctly, those boys those boys would receive 80 to 90% of the college expenses. And she said how? I said how the hell did you go to college. So, many factors impact poor degree completion for African American males however, I think very few are as important as the lack of direction at home, the absence of certain values and finally, a lack of knowing and understanding the system.

### Profile of John J.

The profile is of a program analyst who grew up in the Northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from Macalester College. He was raised in a two parent family household with his brother and sister. John, now in his early 30s, is single and resides in the Northeast.

I was raised in New Jersey, a small town situated in central Jersey on the beach front. During my early years it was about 60% Black and 40 % white. I believe some Latinos, a very small number lived in my town. Most of my friends, actually all of my friends were Black. There were very few white kids in my school. The neighborhood school, the primary school was across the street from my house --- you know, it was a very close knit neighborhood with a small town mentality. The families were mostly lower middle class. I hate to describe the status of the families that way --- I see it in terms of values as well as class. Most families had middle class values but, I guess, very little money. They were a working class people with limited educational attainment, most of them never attended college. My mother was, actually one of the few that attended college, she had an academic scholarship to a college in the South, a small college in South Carolina. She attended for nearly two years, met my father, got married and left school. She always claims that getting married at that time was her big mistake ( JJ laughs) --- I realize that I have strayed far from the point. So, most of my friends' parents were working class people who didn't attend college but thought that it was best that their children attend and graduate from college.



The same group of friends that I went to elementary school with moved from one school to the next with me. The class didn't change very much, the composition of the school didn't change very much we were just moving you know, the same kids changing rooms and buildings. We all knew each other very well and shared aspirations of being something big one day, never really having any idea how we would get there other than, oh well, I guess you go to college and do these things and something good should come of it. I guess that idea was implanted in our heads at some point earlier than I can remember or maybe it was an accumulation of experiences. Our parents drilled the idea of college in us with every available opportunity. My folks would always say "you want to get a good job, then after high school you go to college." I guess this encouragement was strongest with me since I was the youngest child and my mother and father were separated when I was very young. My youngest sister was five years old when my parents separated --- the family was struggling to survive with the added problems between my mother and father, and then I was the newest addition, it must have been very tough on them. After my parents separated the entire family pitched in and helped, including the children. They were all helping my mother help me have the things they didn't have. I believe they thought I as the youngest brother should go to college if anyone was to go. They saw to it that I went to school and that I had intentions of going to college, I really couldn't let them down. In a way it was like they placed this burden on my shoulders to be the man to go to college. I gladly accepted the weight of this responsibility because it was clear to me that I didn't

want to go the route that they had gone, there had to be a better way. I thought maybe this college thing isn't all that bad.

Through out school my classmates, my group --- the group that I mentioned earlier --- my friends and I went to the same classes, classes somewhat more advanced than the rest of the students attended. Everyone would always remind us that we were assigned to these advanced classes. I remember my third grade teacher telling me that "you're going to be assigned to Mr. Johnson's class, and that is the honors class." My friends, the students that I hung out with were part of that group and we all just sort of moved through the system together, being pushed along in the accelerated classes. I remember some guys that weren't in our class made it through and did attend college at some point. Growing up in that environment resulted in sort of a competitive thing amongst my friends, knowing that well, if we want to be successful we must go to college and if you're going so am I, you are not leaving me behind. I believe this whole reoccurring theme of competitiveness amongst my peers played an important role in our early success in school and later success in high school athletics --- we learned to be competitive in the classroom and carried that to the athletic field rather than learning competitiveness only within the context of sports --- I'll bet that was really confusing (JJ laughs). The competitiveness in sports helped to introduce us to some colleges, we all played various sports --- we were all members of the track team. We were recruited by college track coaches from around the country to participate in their athletic programs but we didn't have that much of an interest. It was nice to say, hey, we can run on

the national or perhaps international level but you know, it wasn't something that pushed us.

The person that had the greatest influence on my life in terms of bringing this whole college thing alive was my uncle. Most of the people in my family, actually I can't think of anyone other than myself and my uncle who graduated from a four year college. My uncle really pushed me, encouraging me to take various tests, aptitude tests, standardized tests, regional and state tests of all sorts. He would try to create as many opportunities as possible to give me exposure, not only to college but life in general. I remember that he was an interesting sort, exposing me to different foods at various ethnic restaurants, and taking me to visit different college campuses. I remember going to Princeton University when I was a kid, something totally unknown, alien, foreign to my whole world view. I recall thinking wow, what is this you know, I am a kid and kids from my neighborhood thought that this was movie stuff. You know, he just gave me a snap shot of what life was like outside of my neighborhood.

My uncle also tried to encourage me to participate in the ABC Program (A Better Chance), a program geared towards young African Americans, well minorities, getting them enrolled into private schools. The prep school that my uncle decided I was going to attend was the feeder for Simon's Rock College of Bard, a small private school located somewhere in Massachusetts. At Simon's Rock Academy you would go through your high school years and then you would automatically be accepted into Simon's' Rock of Bard which is the college component of the program. My uncle was always pressuring me to go and look at this opportunity along with others.



My uncle is now working with a number of kids in Trenton, New Jersey. He has placed some kids in Deerfield Academy, Exeter and some of the other better private prep schools in the nation. I was no doubt one of his first projects and he sort of tried to steer me in the direction that he thought was best. Getting African Americans and Latinos, those are the two dominant minority groups in his community, into these private high schools and boarding schools is one of his obsessions and you know, he's been pretty successful at it. I resisted the idea, thinking like wait a minute you want me to leave home, leave my friends, and leave my track team to go to Western Massachusetts to a predominantly white school in the middle of nowhere. I had no idea as to where this school was located. I always thought New York state ended at the Bronx Zoo and New England was in Canada (JJ laughs). So I decided that it was not too good of an idea, I resisted the idea and didn't go.

My older brother attended Rutgers, Newark for a year or two. My uncle, again, encouraged him to go there (Rutgers University in New Jersey) but he didn't complete the degree. I don't remember too much about my brother and his experience at Rutgers because I was only eight years old at the time. He worked construction with my father while in college and I believe construction was paying him more money than most people who had degrees were making. I guess he thought, at the time, what is the use of wasting my time in college when I can be making money and driving a car. Now he expresses an interest in finishing his degree.

One of my sisters who attended a two year institution in Washington, DC, which I believe prepared her for a fairly descent

position in an office. My second sister joined the Air Force out of high school but continued her education. She is now working on her doctorate in Engineering. I was the first to enter a four year institution and graduate. Again, my uncle was the motivational factor behind, I guess, all of us in some way or the other. He had a very strong interest and continues to have a high interest in higher education.

My high school experience was pretty much with the same group, with one exception, there were a few more white kids bussed in from neighboring towns. Most of the bussed kids were from Syrian Jewish middle and upper middle class families residing in sprawling beach front property. For some reason these families sent their children to my high school, maybe they thought they could get a good education there --- a belief in diversity as a valuable part of learning --- I don't know. I knew that our school had a pretty poor reputation in regards to the quality of education that most of the students received. I guess the best example of poor quality education I can think of are the standardized test scores of the students. Actually there was an article in the paper not too long ago stating that we (JJ's old high school) still have some of the poorest test scores in the state of New Jersey, comparable to cities such as Newark and Camden. A city our size and situated where we are was and still is something unheard of, you know, a small town with a large Black population, it's an anomaly given the surrounding towns and their racial composition.

I couldn't tell you the precise SAT scores but I do know that they were pretty bad. I took the SATs twice, my uncle, I remember him

sending me to these schools to take all sorts of standardized tests. I didn't have the slightest idea what it was all about, I was just doing what he wanted me to do because he was becoming a pest and would always pick me up insisting that I comply. Usually I was the only Black person in some of these classes, it was ah a very weird situation for me being taken from home on a Saturday and stuck in a class with a whole bunch of white kids. I started taking classes and practice exams in my freshman year of high school. I believe my uncle just wanted to introduce me to the whole idea of taking tests and his understanding of how you have to prepare yourself. I don't think he was really that aware of why I was taking them. I mean, again my uncle would just drag me off and my mother thought it was a good idea, stating "at least you are being encouraged in the right direction." I think that is what my mother truly believed and made kind supportive comments to encourage me. Usually she would add "your uncle attended college and he should know best how to go about helping you make it into college." Some of her concern was our financial situation, my mother did not have very much money.

My grades were always very high in the lower grades and high school. What was really inconsistent was the very high GPA in high school and my low SAT scores. This, of course, did not discourage me or my friends. I really didn't quite understand the importance of SAT scores. Since I had good grades I believed that I was smart, at least smart enough to succeed in any college. I always had this idea that I was going to college and since I was in accelerated classes, I thought of myself as being smart. Some of us may not have had the best grades, but we still thought that we were smart because we were at



least situated in these classes, set apart from the rest of the student body. That gave us somewhat of a different identify, I think that was very important --- very important for those of us in those classes (JJ appeared to be troubled by his words) ), perhaps damaging to students in lower tracks. The assignment to an accelerated class was such a confidence builder. I did come to the realization early in my high school experience that many of the students placed in the lower tracks were just as smart, and in many instances much smarter. Unfortunately they did not have confidence, the confidence gained by having someone tell them that they were smart. They had been labeled as slow from the very beginning and I, along with my friends, was labeled as smart --- We sort of understood that when we entered Kindergarten, the indoctrination process probably started with me when I was an infant. My uncle and mother would be fighting until this very moment if the school had placed me in a slow track. Being in an accelerated track was a big boost to my self esteem, a self esteem builder for me and my friends.

My friends and I to this very day still talk about our high school experience and how bad the education was and how much of a game of catch up we had to play when we went to college. Our guidance counselors really didn't do a very good job. There were no Black guidance counselors, and the white counselors discouraged us in a number of ways. I mean, my friend Bobby, he works at the Pentagon right now, he, just the other day was telling me how his guidance counselor told him that he should consider a trade school or some other vocation but certainly not college. He said that he looked at her and thought that she must be crazy. Bobby, a part of my group of

high school friends, had confidence in his abilities and strong family support. He said that he sat there and appeared very attentive, not listening to a word she said. I mean, we were taught to respect people in positions of authority but not to believe that white people were interested in our success, at least not as they expected it for white males. You understand, our parents and relatives taught us to appear interested but block-out the words. Black people have seen too much suffering and struggling by placing a great deal of confidence in the advice of whites. Bobby's father had some college but worked as a cook and waiter all of his life; my uncle had some college and worked as an outreach worker, a position not requiring a high school diploma, for a community based agency; my mother had some college and worked as a domestic; the examples are far too numerous based on my limited experience. In order to get the type of jobs that we wanted, we understood or at least we were given the impression that you needed a college degree in order to find out about and obtain certain positions. So we had some idea as to how we should go about getting to the point where we wanted to be. We had a vague idea of certain necessary steps and we clearly understood that college was one of the most important steps getting us to where we sort of envisioned ourselves.

I am very grateful to my uncle as many other Black and Puerto Rican college graduates and students are, he helped introduce me to the idea of college and making the dream a reality. The guidance counselors and teachers at my high school were predominantly white and displayed very little interest in our future. We had two Black administrators (principal and a vice principal) but they never

encouraged us in terms of developing a sense of responsibility. We had to find our own resources for direction and guidance in pursuing our interest in higher education. The two men (principal and a vice principal) were preoccupied with the administration of the school. They appeared to only have the interest or function of seeing how things were going and making sure students didn't get into trouble. As far as encouraging us or presenting themselves as a role model we didn't see any of that. We thought of them more or less as clowns, satisfying the needs of the white parents, they weren't somebody we really looked up to although they should have been role models. I would like to have viewed them that way but that wasn't the case. The two or three Black teachers that we had never really touched us in any way that was important as far as encouraging us to go further. Actually I felt as though all teachers and guidance counselors viewed Black students as just sort of, you know, a part of their job. I do recall one Black math teacher who kept us on path, especially the Black males. Mr. Thomas, a Baptist minister, was much more of a disciplinarian than the other teachers. We did our work in his class and if we didn't or if we laughed or did anything out of order he would pluck us in the head really hard (JJ laughed). But again, there were no teachers, counselors or administrators that I recall who pushed us or encouraged us to consider college. Most of the teachers never really encouraged us to do well in their classes. Perhaps they felt that we knew what was expected, especially those of us in the advanced track.

I found that one of the more significant advantages to the advanced track in terms of preparation for college was being in



classes with a number of white kids that had information and awareness of higher education. To them college appeared to be their next step in life. Competing with them provided me two very important perspectives: I became aware that I was just as smart as these college bound kids, not only because I out performed most of them but I was also in classes that the high school reserved for high achieving students, this validated my ability; and, this experience provided me with increased respect for equality of my potential and opportunity. What I mean is these kids are talking about college and all of these future benefits of college, I realized that I had to start thinking that way, realizing that I was competing against them without any difficulty. This did not allow me to fall victim to that old mind set that they don't think I'm as good as they are because I'm Black. You know how that whole thing plays on your psyche. You believe that you have to prove yourself and with that mind set you were forced to prove yourself.

Even with my placement in advanced classes I remember in my Spanish class, I think I was the only Black student there, I felt as though I was the center piece (the white students watched him to see if he really belonged), so I devoted a great deal of energy showing that I could do this at their level. I really wanted to demonstrate how good, how smart I was. Another example comes to mind, I remember telling a white female classmate that I was going to Macalester College and she displayed resentment and jealousy, although she had never heard of Macalester College. After she found about the college she wanted to know how could I afford to go and questioned my grades, although she knew that I was a high honors student with a grade point

average higher than all but five students in our class. This girl along with the majority of the white students were applying to some of the best colleges and universities in the country, their parents had graduated from some of these prestigious schools and had the financial resources to send their children. Many of these students claimed that they were going to be admitted to some of the better private colleges simply because their parents were graduates. They also had plenty of money to attend any college that they wanted, and that they did. I didn't want to tell my classmates that I was going to "Podunk U". I was again proving that I was as good as my white classmates. I was always fighting my own private battles. I found some satisfaction and relief in the competitiveness with peers.

Race became an issue for me when I went to high school where there were more white students in my classes than Black students. Although the school was about 60% Black, the classes I attended were mostly white --- only a few of us attended those classes (only a few Black students were placed in the advanced track), and that's when race became an issue for me. To sit in a class where you're in the minority and have some idea how they might feel about you, you become determined not to fall victim to their stereotypes. The stereotypes that permeate our society such as he's not going to make it, he's dumb or whatever else they might be thinking or whatever I thought they might be thinking (JJ laughs). I felt a need to combat that thinking or perhaps or my image of what I thought they were thinking. I enjoyed defeating them in what we, my friends and I, called the learning game. Defeating them in the classroom with their teachers (white teachers) judging was, I believe, surprising and embarrassing

to them and the teachers because, you know that they only expect us to excel in athletics. A few of my friends did not perform well in class but being in the advance track, classified as bright was enough for them to feel confident that they could do well if they applied themselves and they too went on to college.

I mentioned earlier that the teachers were not very supportive and in the classroom the white students got better treatment. This treatment was obvious to all of us and my friends often talk about it when we get together. The teachers interacted more with them in ways that they didn't with me; they would call on white students more often than they did with me; some of them could relate to teachers much better in a number of ways than I could ever possibly relate. What I mean is when it came to life experience topics such as: where are you going on vacation this summer? where are your grandparents from? does your father or mother have red hair? --- you get the picture (JJ laughs). That's not a conversation I would participate in, realizing that those were not some of the things that I considered to be culturally relevant to some of us. My hair is cut different, I go to the barber shop here they go to a different place; they might frequent the same restaurants as the teachers, I was not involved in any of that and did not feel as though it was an appropriate conversation. I believed then, as now, that teachers of any race or cultural background should speak to all students in the same language, so to speak, about things that are happening within the classroom. Outside of that realm (classroom discussions), especially when the experiences of students are so different, I really couldn't deal with it. Obviously the teachers felt more comfortable speaking with students



who had something in common with their experience of growing up, what they did as kids, where did daddy go to college, and other things such as that. Personally, I felt locked out of those conversations.

My decision to go to Macalester College was decided by my uncle. I didn't decide to go to this college, he decided for me. I recall that I received a call from this college inquiring about my interest in attending school on a combined athletic (JJ received national attention as a high school track star) and academic scholarship. My uncle happened to be in the room when I received the call and asked me to let him speak to the caller when I finished. He asked the caller the following three questions: "how much would the family have to pay? is there an application fee? will you be able to mail an application to my attention? The extent of my involvement in selecting this college was passing my uncle the telephone. When it was time to leave for college, he had me put my things in the car, and we drove to Minnesota from New Jersey. Along the way he continued to expose me to lots of interesting places and people.

On our way to Minnesota we stopped in Chicago, where I met many of his friends and spent the night with one that was a physicist. His friend was married to an extremely interesting woman that was a writer and most impressive in sharing and explaining her world view. After leaving Chicago we visited another friend that taught at the University of Wisconsin/Madison and lived in a log cabin near the Canadian border. I found this man to be very interesting and I thoroughly enjoyed his life style. Since we spent the night with this professor, I had sufficient opportunity to talk to him about his experience of college as a Black man that had gone to school in

Minnesota and his experience as a college professor. So again, that exposure was very informative and helpful, allowing me to hear about the college experiences of Black people from that region of the country. I enjoyed these testimonies from my uncle's friends, they made me feel comfortable and relaxed with the idea of college now that it was days away from becoming a reality. I knew that Many Blacks had graduated from these academic demanding colleges, but I had never experienced talking to a Black that anyone in my family knew socially. The idea of staying in their homes and having them respond to you as a friend or relative served to demystify the anticipated experience. They made it less mysterious than I had envisioned. As a result of meeting these people I developed the expectation that It would be much more of a comfortable place than I anticipated, someplace where you had friends, a social life, independence, and many other things that I might not have originally thought --- boy was that a bunch of bullshit (JJ laughs).

When I arrived at Macalester they held a social for the African American students and I remember that students asked why did I select Macalester college and I would reply my uncle sent me here. So, I was in Minnesota, I was in and there was nothing to turn me around at that point. I could not and would not disappoint my family. They all believed that I was smart and I could make it in college, the family had made many sacrifices in order to make it possible for me to go to college and get a degree. So, it was that pressure, I remember hearing my sisters saying that "my brother is so smart", my mother saying "my son is so smart", how could I disappoint them. I was in a setting where I very quickly realized that I was alone, the faculty

didn't believe in me and the white students thought that I was there on some special assistance program for minorities. My uncle was the most loved and hated man in my life during my first four or five months. I believe he wanted me as far away from home as possible so that I wouldn't be able to come home or give up. Now, I understand that my uncle and his friends anticipated an unfriendly campus that would not welcome Blacks as equals, I guess they didn't want to discourage me. I respect his decision and realize that my success in high school with similar teachers and students was good experience.

There is one overriding and important thing that I remember discussing with African American students at Macalester, some of the reasons why they were leaving the college, and most of them felt that they didn't belong. I remember a proposal that I had to see what we could do to create an environment where we would feel that we did indeed belong. I wanted to determine what did other Black students feel was necessary to know, what did they think was needed from the administration to put in place to make them feel more welcomed. I found the following concerns to be issues that we all believed required immediate attention: One area of expressed need was for more Black faculty, and again, that sort of echoed a long standing need voiced by African American students, a need for role models that would encourage them. We only had one Black professor there and he was part time. A second concern expressed was the need for an African American History Program --- most of the Black students felt that they didn't have anything that was relevant to them. We had nothing to allow us to explore our own history or for that matter, allow other groups to gain an accurate awareness of who we were and our contributions. They



could develop, I believe, or at least I could realize our place in the world which would give me a greater sense of worth. The third concern was a call for more social events geared toward the needs of Blacks. The college's programming committee, the committee responsible for bringing entertainment to the college, was expected to bring in more culturally relevant entertainment and activities. These were some of the things that were lacking and when I became president of the student body, these were some of the things that I tried to bring to the table when I dealt with the administration and the entire student body. I was able I bring in John Henry Clark, a Black historian, brought in Susan Taylor and they thought these were very rewarding experiences. I was also able to develop programs to take students out to visit people in the Black community as well as bringing in Black Alumni to talk to Black students. I set visits with local Black church choirs to visit the college and we would visit them. Many of these people would invite us into their homes for meals and socials, creating surrogate families for us. This type of programming worked really well for all of us.

I think that I worked so hard to become student government president in order to create this network around me to make me feel needed because that was the way it was, now that I think about it, when I was in high school. I felt important, I felt needed, my contributions, you know, were looked highly upon. When I made a comment in class it was something that people valued, when you see yourself as being valued. I think you might think differently or think twice about leaving school. It gives you a greater sense of worth, you have friends and you are equals. The college did not

foster an environment that made Black students feel a part of or welcomed. I didn't feel nor do I believe other Black students felt that white students, faculty and administration considered us as equals and we were treated as not necessarily being wanted there. So those are some of the things that I think about whenever I reflect on my collegiate experience --- they are not pleasant memories.

My college experience was important in that I gained several skills that have helped me in my life after college, so to speak. What I brought from college that helped me, in my life after the collegiate experience if you will, was a sense of understanding that I can't do it all by myself. I realized that I had to build support networks around me to facilitate my progress. In the absence of my friends, those high school friends, that I left home before I entered college, I experienced a tremendous amount of loneliness, social isolation. After a few short weeks at Macalester College I realized that I had to try to recreate that environment at my college. I did in a sense build those support networks around me to give myself a sense of worth, that sense of worth that I had in high school. Since I had experienced building this network of support in college I think I had an idea how to go about recreating it in my community. That was accomplished by participating in local politics --- again it was a sense of accomplishment. Although my community was very racist, it was not in the same league with Macalester. It just couldn't get any worse than that. If I completed four years there in Minnesota under some of the worse conditions, I think for me, I could do that anywhere. The college experience made me feel much more confident in my abilities to persevere. I guess that experience taught me that

under any circumstances I could survive, and no matter how much I was discouraged I could open up to people around me and have them share my experience and help me work through it.



### Profile of Mike O.

The profile is of an editor for financial publications for a large Wall Street financial service who grew up in the South and earned his undergraduate degree from Wesleyan University. He was raised in a two parent family household. Mike, now in his early 40s, is married and resides in the Northeast.

I was lucky to have been raised by a mother and father who cared about their children very deeply. I was born October 26, 1955 in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, one of the few all-Black towns in the United States, in an all-black hospital called Tiborians. My family, however, lived in a town that is about 15 miles south of Mound Bayou called Cleveland, Mississippi. My father worked there with the Mississippi 'Negro' branch of the Cooperative Extension Service, where he was responsible for giving advice to black farmers on how to be better farmers and grow better crops.

I can remember my first day in kindergarten. I cried intensely. I cried so much that I got a headache and my mother, who accompanied me to school on my first day of kindergarten (it was either my mother or my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Stringer) had to put a cold towel on my forehead to calm me down, to cool me off. I went to St. Gabriel's Elementary School in Mound Bayou, an all-black school run by Black nuns and a Black priest. I studied at St. Gabriel's from kindergarten through fourth grade. My family was Catholic. I was born a Catholic, so I not only attended the school, but I went to church there every Sunday; Saint Gabriel's was a church school.

I was an only child for thirteen years and as a result, I think I developed a somewhat active imagination. My father was a

particularly strong influence in terms of my educational aspirations. He had finished college, and he was very proud of having graduated from Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. He had also gone to Lincoln University in Pennsylvania for a year, after having done a stint in the Korean Conflict. He served as an officer during W.W.II. During W.W.II he was stationed in Belfast, Northern Ireland. So with that kind of background, he had a pretty strong influence in shaping my interest in education as a child. As a matter of fact, I think when I was either in third or fourth grade I can remember going to Tallahassee, Florida to his graduation. He obtained a master's degree at Florida A&M, and it just so happened that my mother's first cousin was an educator at Florida A&M, a Dr. Leedell Neyland.

Both of my parents are from Mississippi; my father, who passed away in 1990, was from West Point and my mother is from Gloster, Mississippi. My father, I believe, had nine brothers and sisters, and my mother comes from a family of fifteen, so my extended family is very large. But again I would stress the fact that I was lucky in that I had a loving mother and father who did everything in their power to make my life comfortable. I can say a lot in tribute to them; I never went hungry a day in my life, I always had clothes on my back, and although I didn't get everything I wanted, I certainly got everything I needed. I think that is also very important because I can remember, early-on, my mother serving us with vitamins every morning. We raised a garden in the summer time, so we had plenty of fresh vegetables, collards, corn, and tomatoes year round. My father had a small plot of land that he bought in Cleveland and raised vegetables on for the family. He also had a house built for us.

Agriculture was his specialty, his field, so gardening came naturally to him. He was a very strong and dynamic man who influenced me profoundly. The house he built, that we lived in, consisted of a living room, kitchen, small dining area, a bathroom, two bedrooms, and a den. We had hardwood floors, and the den was where we had a small library, a shelf that went from the bottom of the base of the floor to the ceiling, and that book shelf was filled with books.

As an only child I spent a lot of time --- I'd say by the time I was in the second or third grade, I could read fairly well, not that I was an excellent reader by any means, but I could read. I spent a lot of time reading and looking at the pictures in the World Book Encyclopedia. I think, it was in some ways like studying the National Geographic. I became aware of a larger world of places like Africa and China. The encyclopedia was very helpful in terms of giving me a sense of what was beyond Cleveland, Mississippi. By the time I was in third grade, I remember being kind of a showoff you know, and my classmates called me professor. I used to recite facts that I learned from reading the World Book Encyclopedia.

The ethnic composition of a place like Cleveland, Mississippi was probably like most towns in Mississippi where you have a racial divide; Black people live on one side of town and white people live on the other side. Of course we were deprived socio-economically, no question about it. Whites lived in a much nicer neighborhood, most of them did. But somehow or another, as I mentioned earlier, my father was still able to keep poverty at bay and create a decent place for us to live and provide us with food and shelter; he did an excellent job.



So you know, most of the people of my early years were all Black, that included the Black nuns at the Catholic school that I attended. The nuns were very good in terms of my educational development; they were dedicated and very strict, all of that stuff was good for me.

We stayed in Cleveland until I was about seven or eight years old, at which time my father was transferred from Cleveland to Clarksdale, which is about twenty miles north of Mound Bayou. All of these little towns are situated along a highway called highway 61, which takes you from the base of Mississippi up to Chicago and beyond. It was a main artery that linked Mississippi with Chicago, and I am sure that it was quite influential in the migration of Blacks after W.W. II. The distance between Clarksdale and Cleveland--you have Mound Bayou in between--was about thirty miles or so. My father commuted during the week for about a year and returned home on the weekends before we eventually moved to Clarksdale. By the time I was ready to enter fifth grade, we moved to Clarksdale and initially roomed with an elderly lady named Mrs. Hanson, in the Black section of town. We might have lived with her for about a year and a half or two years until my father saved enough to buy a house. We ended up moving into a new house that he had built, just as he had done in Cleveland.

In terms of making a contrast between Cleveland and Clarksdale, Cleveland was a more subdued city; people there were nicer while Clarksdale tended to be much rougher. It was the first time I had encountered gangs, gangs similar to those I heard about in Chicago.

They weren't quite as bad as those we heard about in Chicago, but Clarksdale had a city feel to it. Clarksdale is right in the middle of the Mississippi Delta; it is a blues town. A lot of blues musicians come out of Clarksdale, musicians like Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker are from Clarksdale. B.B. King is from Indianola, which is not too far from Clarksdale. Ike Turner is also from Clarksdale. So it was a very dynamic city.

Again, I went to a Catholic school, but the ethnic composition was slightly different in contrast to St. Gabriel's. In Clarksdale--now remember this was in the early to mid-sixties--we had all Black students and white teachers, with some Black lay teachers. My mother was one of the lay teachers. My mother was a school teacher and when we moved to Clarksdale--perhaps I should backtrack a little. While we were in Cleveland, my mother completed her college education at Mississippi Valley State College in Ita Bena, Mississippi. She went to a four-year college and got her degree in teaching and that's what she did when she moved to Clarksdale. She found a job as a teacher in the Catholic school. So I was essentially going to the same school where my mother taught. When I started Immaculate Conception, my first new experience was attending a school where the priest and all of the nuns were white and all lay teachers were Black; I was used to an all Black staff. My first year there I had a Black lay teacher, Mrs. Carlross, and in my second year I had a white nun. That was really my first encounter with whites. In terms of my schooling, I went to Immaculate Conception from the fifth to the ninth grade. I was able to hold my own as a student, I wasn't the best student in my class but I was usually up in the top one or two students in my class.

Having grown up in the late fifties and early sixties, I can remember Jim Crow, I remember racist acts my father experienced. I remember traveling with my mother to a small Mississippi town when she gave in to my complaints of being hungry and we went to a restaurant where they pushed our steak sandwiches under the back door and told us that we could eat on the back steps. This treatment sends a lasting very powerful message to you about white people. Do you realize that the owner permitted his dog to enter the restaurant and go in the kitchen where he ate his food and white men, women and children had no problem with the dog entering the place. It was perfectly acceptable and I might add, legal for them to refuse to allow a Black woman and her child to come in-- we ate on the back steps like dogs (Mike laughed), not really the dog was treated better, he was accepted.

There was a lot of political activity in Mississippi during the 1960's, but I was basically insulated from it. I never saw a Klansman while living in Mississippi. I never really had any direct memorable bad experiences with white people, although I knew what they represented. Having been exposed to TV and listening to conversations from my parents and friends, I knew that white people were evil and full of hatred. It was in the seventh and eighth grade when I started to read, started to pick up books. I can remember reading, I think maybe the first book, a novel, that I ever finished was "The GodFather" by Mario Puzo--that was about seven or eight years before the book was made into a movie. I can recall having a fascination with the "La Cosa Nostra" and the "Mafia", stuff like that. I was also reading books about the Black Panthers, I was reading James Baldwin, and just becoming more politically aware.



During my years at St. Gabriel's I don't recall my being much of a leader, but students looked up to me because I could recite facts from the World Book Encyclopedia. I didn't look at myself as a leader but I did, at that time, have independent ideas of what and how I thought things should be. I can remember, you know (Mike laughed), telling my relatives about how I felt about some political things and about life, and they were kind of impressed by it.

My teachers at St. Gabriel's were good teachers. They were concerned, but they were strict; I mean, I am talking about some strict Black "sisters" (Mike laughed). You don't even see Black nuns anymore, but they were there for us when I was a kid. These were the nuns who wore the habits; you didn't see any part of their body except their face, hands, and feet. They wore the black habits and the white bib with the head piece up top. One teacher (nun) I remember in particular was Sister Dorothy. We called her Sonny Liston--if you recall Sonny Liston, Floyd Patterson and Muhammed Ali were big fighters back in those days. Sister Dorothy was a disciplinarian as well as a good teacher; I remember her being a stern disciplinarian. I might not have been the brightest student in class, (Mike laughed) but I always completed my lessons before she asked a second time.

In terms of Clarksdale and Immaculate Conception, the big thing there was my first-time experience with whites as administrators and teachers. Academically, I was in the top two or three percent of the class. I can remember the first white nun I had, Sister Stanisklaus; she would talk to us about the Communist menace and how we were threatened. She would go on about how the Communists were threatening us and we had to be aware of that. She also talked about Jean Dixon,

the lady who makes the predictions. As I recalled, I think I did pretty well in her class. It wasn't until seventh or eighth grade when I met Sister Lauranne Schmidt. She was one woman who had a profound effect on me and was probably the key person who turned my life around, or who did something that really had a profound effect on the direction of my life. She was a young, fine (very well shaped) and attractive (Mike laughed) white "sister." By that time the nuns had stopped wearing the habits. They were allowed to dress in casual clothes. It was the first time we got a chance to see their legs and the shape of their bodies. I remember her teaching us songs such as "Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore," folk songs, and freedom songs.

She was a biology and science teacher, but she was the first person to teach me about Black history. It was very rudimentary, you know, but I thank her for that, and she inspired me to work hard in class. I was always the type who played sports, socialized with my classmates, but I always tried to do my homework.

In my family's home there was time allotted for homework. My mother and father would help me with my homework if I needed it. Having a father who had a master's degree and a mother who is a college graduate and a teacher, of course, helped me focus on education--you have two excellent role models there. I am absolutely certain that a profound influence on the extent to which young people are able to focus on academics and education depends on having a positive role model. This is also important--my parents were religious people. We went to church every Sunday; they didn't drink, they didn't smoke, they argued, they fought (Mike laughed), but they

loved each other. Basically, they were just good loving parents and, you know, as I said at the outset, I am lucky that way to have had a set of good loving parents.

(Mike laughed) Back to Sister Lauranne's influence: she was the one who--you know this was the sixties and you had the Black liberation movement all around us. We had people coming to school from outside of Mississippi, mostly people from the North. I remember in ninth grade this African guy came to our class and talked to us about African history. But, this guy had gone to Philip Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, and his visit wasn't lost on me. Philip Exeter Academy is a really good school, one of the best in the country. I thought, wow, this guy must be a genius, he was really smart. At that very moment I thought, I want to be like him, I wanted that for myself, too. I knew about the school at the time because Sister Lauranne had told me about it. She was the one who was instrumental in getting me to apply to their summer school program. You see, at that time there was an effort afoot by Northern universities and colleges to recruit Blacks. I remember telling my mother about it and how if I went, maybe I could become a doctor or lawyer. I think the point is that the opportunity of going to this school was not lost on me. I knew benefits of going, and it was something that I wanted to do.

I should also say that my father was a strict disciplinarian, a very serious man and this opportunity to go away to school was coming at the beginning of my adolescence, and things were kind of difficult between my father and me. I saw going away to school as a way to get



from under his influence. I was an only child for thirteen years until my sister, Patricia, was born around that in 1968.

I was accepted to the summer school in 1971. I had--this is when you could fly from Memphis to Boston for \$50--gotten a scholarship, which covered my expenses. A friend of mine from Immaculate Conception went there one summer as well, a fellow named Tony Hall. Just let me backtrack a little bit and give this some more context.

The nuns at Immaculate Conception, especially Sister Lauranne, made a concerted effort to pick out promising Black students and give them the opportunity to travel, to study during the summer, or to get scholarships to schools in the North. There was a concerted effort to see that we got a good education, to take advantage of opportunities that were opening up to us as a result of all the political activism on the part of Blacks in the late sixties. And it had ramifications right there in Clarksdale, Mississippi, otherwise I wouldn't have gone to an Exeter.

Exeter is basically a school for very, very bright kids, most of whom are from very wealthy families. I had to cope with many academic problems in terms of that summer program. They asked me to drop back a grade. When I went there I should have gone in as an eleventh grader, but they asked me to drop back because my test scores, my PSAT scores, were not as high as they wanted them to be or not as high as other students. So I bit the bullet and looked at it in terms of taking one step back and then I would take two or three steps forward. I was accepted there as a regular student after that summer in the Fall 1971. I entered Exeter as a sophomore. For three years, here is

this kid from Clarksdale, Mississippi, the Delta, the land of hard knocks, the bedrock of racism, with apartheid equal to South Africa, going to this private elite school, in a cold climate fifteen hundred miles away from home, in Exeter, New Hampshire.

Exeter was a predominately white school. I think there were some 900 students, 60 of whom were Black. Those Black students came from all over the United States; California, St. Louis, Chicago, Georgia, Mississippi, and you had some from New York City, and then maybe one or two from New Hampshire. You know, of course, we were kind of tight, pretty tight. I think to some extent, most of us were struggling academically, but most of the people (Black and white students) were struggling academically because the school was so academically rigorous. At Exeter a C might have been an A+ at Immaculate Conception. Exeter's standards were vastly different, much higher, forcing me to come face to face with the fact that I didn't know how to write as well as I thought I did, didn't know how to read as well as I thought I did, and there was a lot about the world that I didn't know. On the other hand, I continued to excel athletically. I ran track, played basketball, and varsity football as a junior and senior and rowed on the crew team for a semester during my senior year.

Academically, I struggled at Exeter. However, I always persisted, continued to read and write and learn best I could. In terms of support, we're talking 1971 you know, this was an experiment. We were the first group of Black students to ever go to that school in such numbers. In prior years, you might have had one or two Black students there. We supported each other. We got some support from

the faculty, but not the kind of nurturing support you would have gotten, I think, had there been more Black teachers. There were two Black faculty members there, and I think there were just too many of us for them to be that close with. But I struggled and maintained maybe a C- average my first year there. It was tough. I was on the verge of really losing confidence in my ability to function. It was really, really tough. I am not saying this for any undue sympathy because the Exeter experience was tough on everybody, whatever their background. I weathered the storm, although it was like sinking to your lowest point, and the only way you can go is up. I didn't give up. I kept trying and by struggling I eventually began to see the light. I began to figure out what was going on in terms of the academic expectations. I discovered that I enjoyed writing and reading, and that was because I had a very good English teacher, Mr. Heath. He broke through the wall for me. He showed me how to write, how to express myself. I can remember, we were reading Faulkner, "The Unvanquished", and had to write about that story, a short essay. He sat down with me and showed me what I was doing and suggested ways to improve my writing. I began to see my writing. I began to understand the concepts of grammar and how one should express himself in words that make sense. That class, that experience with him, was the turning point for me.

While at Exeter I focused in French. I had also studied French when I was at Immaculate Conception. For some reason, I was fairly good in math in terms of standardized tests. I did better in math than I did in English on the verbal part (of the PSAT), but my love was reading and writing. By my senior year, I had broken through to



the extent that I wrote at a level exceeding some of my classmates. The last semester of my senior year, I won a history prize, the Nagely History prize, and the small, less prestigious Teacher's English prize. I never made high honors, but I was always proud of winning those awards.

As I mentioned earlier, I was on scholarship--this outreach to Blacks was somewhat of an experiment during that time period. That special outreach effort extended a helping hand to young African American high school students and made going to Exeter a reality for me. The ABC program (A Better Chance) was a key part of this experiment. There were several students from Immaculate Conception, in fact my best friend, Leonard Prater went through the ABC Program; he went off to a private school in Colorado. I had a good friend who was at Exeter with me, Ed Cooper, who attended Exeter through ABC. He loves that program dearly to this very day for having provided that formal framework. ABC sought out promising young Black students, brought them to these predominately white sectarian prep schools and provided them with money and guidance. But I wasn't really an ABC student you know. What I did, other than having Sister Lauranne recommend that experience to me, I did on my own.

Exeter was taking a chance on me and what they did was very smart. There was a Black guy, I think he was from Arkansas, I can't remember his name, but they had this guy come to my house in Clarksdale to interview me, and I remember he took me to lunch at the Holiday Inn in Clarksdale where we talked. As a graduate, he told me about his feelings toward Exeter, his experience there. But, you know, he had to come to my house, so that gave him the opportunity to

see what kind of home life I had, to meet my parents, and I am sure he relayed the information to the school. I remember him saying that, 'Exeter could be a racist institution, although it is a good school.' Having come from Mississippi, (Mike laughs) I was not bothered by that too much. As for the racism, I knew it couldn't have been as unrelenting as I was used to in Mississippi. Now I did experience racism directed at me while at Exeter from the teachers and my white classmates, but it wasn't anything near what I was used to.

While at Exeter I did not hold any leadership positions, although I continued with my athletics. That wasn't my thing. I wasn't the leader type. I was a bit of an outsider. I can remember my father preaching to me when I was growing up, telling me to 'be your own man, learn how to think on your own two feet.' I wasn't as aware of a certain amount of racism at Exeter because I was in an environment where people were more subtle. I was used to a Mississippi "redneck" style of racism.

It is also important for me to say that I had certain social needs that were extremely difficult to fulfill in Exeter. I mean, there were sixty Black students there, out of nine hundred, and out of those sixty Black students, ten were Black females and fifty Black men. So there was a lot of competition for female attention. As things happened, I found a white girlfriend. She was German. I don't think that set well with the Black students. There was a tendency among the Black guys there at the time, well, some of them had liaisons with white girls, but it was always in the closet. But that wasn't a part of my makeup. I openly had a two-year relationship with Margot, who loved me very much. Her father was a faculty member; he

was a psychologist there. I knew the Black students, and perhaps white students, resented my openness in dating a white girl, but I was my own man and really didn't care what other people thought of me.

I thank my parents for what they instilled in me as a young child, what they offered in preparing me to make good decision every step of the way. Their preparation pointed me in the direction that I should travel and their guidance instilled in me the values that I needed to stay on the right path. That was very evident when I was selecting a college. I had good parents. They weren't rich, they scuffled everyday just to survive. My parents never pressured me to go to any particular college. My advisor at Exeter, a white guy, a Mr. Wooley who taught Greek and Latin, told me that since my father went to Hampton (Hampton University, a historically Black college), perhaps I should go to Hampton. My father and mother didn't pressure me; they basically left that decision up to me.

Since I was an athlete, you know, I had been recruited when I was a senior in high school by Wesleyan University to play football for them. They paid my way down and showed me the campus, but I knew that my athletic prowess was not that great. I knew that I couldn't make a career out of it. So I realized that my focus had to be on academics. I always had a love for reading literature and writing, and by that time I had discovered that I wanted to be a writer. I applied to Wesleyan and Northwestern and was accepted at both. I decided to go to Northwestern because they offered me a nice scholarship package, because I wanted to get away from Margot (she went to Barnard) whom I wasn't ready to marry, and because I didn't want to play football for Wesleyan.



I excelled at Northwestern, taking a lot of courses in South African history, French literature, and writing. I made the Dean's list each quarter, but decided to transfer to Wesleyan after my freshman year because Northwestern didn't have a school year abroad program in France and it was so damn cold there on Lake Michigan.

Wesleyan, my undergraduate college, had a reputation of being a liberal college with a kind of hippie, arty feel to it, but academically rigorous. Wesleyan was where I began to feel racism among the students, and the faculty, and the town's (Middletown, CT.) people much more so than I had felt at a place like Exeter, which was far more insulated and where I think people's racial attitudes were not nearly as pronounced.

At Wesleyan I had a couple of good teachers. The school has a tremendous faculty with an outstanding reputation. Wesleyan was a small, predominately white college with about 2,000 students, with 200 of the 2,000 being Black and Latino. I can remember a couple of professors who had a pretty profound impact on me; Professor Jerry Long, a Black professor who taught in the religion department and in the Center for African Affairs. The second person, a Jewish professor, Phil Hallie who was my professor and advisor when I was in the College of Letters, a three-year interdisciplinary program that covered the 2,000-year Western tradition from literary, historical, and philosophical perspectives and required one semester of study abroad. I studied in Paris for five months in 1976. You know, that was a pretty intense experience for me, because I must say that the reason why I joined the College of Letters--you recall I had mentioned that I had studied South African history at Northwestern. Having come

from Mississippi, I was interested in racism, its origins, race relations. The most poignant experience was studying the history of South Africa.

People focus so much on the brutality that occurred (in South Africa) within this last century, but the brutality that went on some three or four hundred years ago when whites first came to that colony is just unbelievable. The level of inhumanity whites showed to the indigenous people was absolutely incredible in its barbarity.

So, I went to Wesleyan asking myself--well, setting this goal for myself--What makes white people so cruel? So, I knew that the best way to get some insight into this was to study their culture. That is why I studied Western culture from its supposed inception up to the present.

I was the only Black male in the College of Letters for the entire three years. There were two Black females. One was from Haiti, and she hardly spoke to me the whole time I was there. The other one was a Black woman from Philadelphia; we were pretty cool with each other. But that didn't bother me too much because, as I said before, I wasn't in the crowd, so to speak. What I mean is that people knew me because I was in it (in the presence of the crowd), but kind of not of it (did not participate with the crowd). But I was doing my thing academically as much as I could. I wasn't as academically serious as should have been, and I think part of it can be attributed to the racism among some of the faculty. They just didn't appear to be accustomed to seeing a Black guy in my program. The kind of nurturing you get from a professor who really cares about your learning experience I didn't get that with some of the

professors, and I could feel it. That was kind of disheartening and at times I felt as though I was fighting against all odds to some extent. I mean I got through the program and graduated but it didn't have to be so painful and difficult. Without the help of Professor Hallie, who was a 'big man' in the program, I would not have made it. White students don't realize how easy they have it, not being burdened with the racial, social, and political problems that confront so many Black folk daily.

Back to this one experience with this one professor, well you know a lot of the stuff, I mean this professor happened to be Jewish and I don't want to--you have to be very careful, you know, when you start moving into stereotypes. But the Jewish people are a very literate people, and they have a long tradition of scholarship. I think the attitude with this one professor in particular was that I didn't bring the level of scholarship to my work that he thought was appropriate. He tried to fail me, and it was Professor Hallie, who understood kind of where I was coming from, who acted as a mentor of sorts.

I was intimidated in class to the extent that I didn't talk much, I didn't interact with students and professors as much as I wanted to. I read everything they put in front of me, everything, and would sit there and wait until somebody would come up with some ideas that I had about the text, but that seldom happened. I can remember, for instance, we were studying Beowulf and, for me, what I saw in the text was the beginning, the seeds of fascism that found fruition in Hitler. But that kind of interpretation of the text, I think they (white faculty and students) viewed it as extremely far fetched. I



guess a part of it was that (they felt) I was not studying my culture. I mean, I'm studying a culture that's alien, that's foreign to me, so I didn't have that kind of instinctive feel for the text that he would have.

Throughout my educational experience, I think I've been affected most when I felt that my professors cared about me and cared that I understood the concepts. I guess I can sum up my experience of racism by saying that at Exeter I have one white friend with whom I'm still close, while I don't think I have a single white male friend from Wesleyan. The people that I remember and maintain contact with from Wesleyan are Blacks. It is not that you experience anything necessarily overt, it's just that you know you were getting to the point where you felt a separateness and apartness from the white students and faculty. I think part of that might have been colored by the fact that I had been to Exeter and I knew what closeness was, and I just didn't have that feeling while being at Wesleyan. The teachers and professors didn't, at least to me, bring the level of concern and caring for the students that those professors at Exeter did.

Actually I don't recall being close enough to any white students at Wesleyan to know exactly how they felt about the Black presence on campus there. They, I believe held feelings about quality and worthiness as students, because I believe it was a part of their makeup to some extent. Nowadays there's a very concrete and visible backlash towards affirmative action and this so-called lowering of standards by allowing African Americans into these schools. Some of that feeling might have been there in my day, but I don't think it was quite as pronounced as it is today. Remember, this was the mid-to

late-seventies, and idea that 'we need to give a helping hand to these people' was still prevalent. On the other hand, having had that Exeter background kind of helped also I enrolled in what I thought was one of the tougher academic programs at Wesleyan. So I didn't feel as much of that attitude of who is or isn't deserving of an opportunity. They might have felt that way but, do you know what, if they did, I didn't give a damn; I was going to get what I wanted to get and I did. You know, now that I have started discussing this very important topic, well, just let me say that it gets pretty deep for me because while at Wesleyan and, again, you know this is Michael, who is in it but not of it, I went to Wesleyan with the sense that, and, even while I was at Exeter, that I was there to fight. I was still part of the revolution. I didn't get a chance to participate in the overt struggles of the sixties, but I felt pretty strongly about the good caring people that went out there and fought for me to have an opportunity, and I believed that we should keep the pressure on.

When I got to Wesleyan it became very clear to me that the Black students there were mired in bourgeoisdom, and they had no inclination to continue this fight, this struggle, that had started in the late fifties and sixties for equality and for genuine liberation. And you know, to some extent, that was a profound revelation to me during my experience at Wesleyan. I resented that attitude among the Black students there; I resented that attitude deeply.

I was heavily involved in the music of Parliament/Funkadelic. Part of the reason that I was so involved in their music was because they were intellectuals, whether we believe it or not. They stole various concepts and came up with a unique and original art form.

They were politically very sophisticated. They were sophisticated spiritually, and they didn't adopt this bourgeois posturing, Black bourgeois posturing, that I saw all around me. Black students at Wesleyan didn't understand what I was going through, or what I was trying to say through this group. And so I was ostracized to some extent. I refused--see part of being so locked into this music as I was that it gave me my identity, kept my feeling of self-worth constantly reinforced. So, I wasn't about to succumb to any kind of second classness, although the temptation to do so was there.

My response to this debate (centering around meritocracy) that, I guess, started with Bakke--when I was at Exeter I had a history teacher, Professor Cole, who got up in assembly and talked about--this was during the Nixon era--how the pendulum, he used this metaphor, the pendulum--swings one way and swings the other way. So in the sixties the pendulum was swinging left, and, as we entered the seventies it was beginning to swing to the right. That's exactly what was happening during the Nixon administration, and, if you recall, the Bakke case came out around that time. If you look at it within the context of what Black students were doing when I was in school in the mid-to late-seventies, we were moving away from our militancy and more towards this mainstream attitude, which says my objective is to go out and get in the mainstream and make as much money as I possibly can, and my race and all others be damned. As a result of that attitude we forgot, we capitulated, and we bought into this argument. We even allowed the argument to find fruition and justification. I mean, the Bakke case should have been nipped in the bud from the very inception because it has very little basis in fact.



Ideology allows a white person, when he or she sees a Black person, to assume that the person shouldn't be in a job or school because he or she is incompetent. This ideology is just founded on ignorance, ignorance of themselves, ignorance of Black people, ignorance of history. It is really unfortunate because I think that if people--and the literature is here: there are more books on Black people and the Black experience than you and I could read in three or four lifetimes; the books are right here in our midst--if people don't take time to read the books, and particularly if it's not incorporated into your learning experience as you're growing up woefully ignorant of how for 350 years these white people in America systematically and unremittingly locked, or tried to lock, Black people out of this society. We were locked out educationally, economically, even the churches were locked to us; they were all closed to us, and all of this was done systematically. It was codified in the laws, codified in people's cultural beliefs and behavior; so, if I am a little behind, I am not gonna feel bad about it. I think I've done damn well to be where I am, given all the bullshit and all of the hoops that not only I, but Black people as a whole have been forced to jump through. I'm not going to--there's no way in the world that any white person in America is going to tell me that I'm an affirmative action case. If I am, so what? So what I'm only getting my due, I mean, there's no way in the world you're going to make up 350 years of unremitting oppression in 30 years. The argument--perhaps there should have been a concerted effort among our leaders back in the seventies to quash this whole idea of affirmative action, this notion of getting something for nothing. We sat up there and let that argument grow and

grow and grow until we got a situation today where these Republicans in Congress--Bob Dole who five years ago supported affirmative action, and turn right around five years later and based his political platform on disenfranchising Black people from the workforce.

Before I move on let me say once again that I'm lucky because I had beautiful parents. Beyond what the school and peers could do, I think it started with my parents, and they were just beautiful people in the sense that I had a loving mother who showed me love, a father who did the same thing, who protected and cared for me. They were religious people, spiritual people who created a loving environment for their children. They fought, they had their problems, but basically they created a loving environment and had a beautiful sense of how to treat everybody. They knew where they came from and where they wanted to go. They knew they were Black, but my father, and he more than my mother, didn't want to deal with that ugliness of racism and slavery. My mother was a little bit more political than he was in that respect.

Again, I must say that I'm lucky; I'm lucky because my life shaped up in such a way as I was able to learn two languages, the language of Black culture and I formally studied the language of white culture. I also studied, for two years, African American culture, formally in graduate school at UCLA. So, I have a sense of what our culture is about. I think I am very lucky to have that kind of knowledge and that kind of exposure; it helps me to understand this fucked-up stuff on this side (where Blacks are coming from) and that fucked-up stuff on that side (where whites are coming from). A lot of it is just ignorance. Most white people are just woefully ignorant of

Black people's history, just as much as Black people are ignorant of white folks' history. It's a shame that we let ignorance reign, we think it's great. But it is unfortunate that we live in a time where people don't want to focus on this kind of stuff, where myopia and 'racism' is the order of the day.

I think my college experience is important in terms of learning how to negotiate on a more adult level with people who might not necessarily share your vision and your perceptions. You're in this environment. You're all pretty bright. You all have something going for you, and you have to figure out a way to get along, to get the things that you need, and allow other people to get the things that they need. So those kinds of skills, that come through interaction, are very important life skills that are beneficial, I think, in helping people deal with social relations in life, and in terms of the workforce. The development of my skills started early. It's not something that happened overnight. It was developmental, no doubt starting at birth (Mike laughs) or sooner.

I continue to enjoy reading and writing. I mean, when I finished college and was going through my graduate studies, people would ask what do you do? I often replied by saying that basically I just read and write; it's just that simple. I read a lot. Reading exposed me to life, the world, people, the way people think, and it developed my analytical skills. The writing--I did as much of it in college as I could. At every opportunity I took courses that required you to write papers. So I wrote and I wrote, constantly honing my skills in order to learn how to express myself pretty well in writing. I mean, writing is a good skill to have. I don't have any technical



computer skills, I'm not a mathematician, I 'm not a doctor. I specialize in language, the English language, and I can speak it and I can write it with some facility.

My writing has been very helpful; I worked as a newspaper man, and now I am an editor for a large financial institution in New York City. The reading and writing helped me to develop my analytical skills. A lot of it is just being able to think on your feet, and it is also being able to have a certain level of discernment. You must be able to separate reality from appearance, and that is something that's not acquired overnight. It comes through study, focus, and concentration. It is also important for you to always have confidence in yourself, confidence in your ability. Black parents should teach their children, starting at a very young age, to never let white people rob their children of their self-confidence.

I recall at Exeter when I reached a very low point and almost lost confidence in myself. I had failed in my studies, and I was about to give up on me, it was the lowest level I had ever reached in my life in terms of my level of self-confidence. But, from that point on, there was no place to go but up, so I prayed. I believe prayer is very important. I think it comes from having grown up in a family that's religious but not overly religious, a family that had a sense of spirituality, had an amazing and beautiful sense of how to treat people. They clearly understood the road that I should take to get to my destination and, I believe, they gave me the values to succeed, to see the journey to its conclusion.

On the other hand, sometimes formal education is not it. I look at my heroes, like Jimi Hendrix, George Clinton, and Sun Ra. A lot of

them never finished high school. Jesus Christ didn't go to school at all, and millions of people look to him for guidance and salvation. I can remember Mrs. Funches from Clarksdale, who could barely read and write, but she knew how to save money, she knew how to treat people, and she was able to give me a big helping hand along the way. What I am really saying is simply this, some things are not in the books, some things you get through experience.

I would tell any young African American male interested in going to college that you must have dreams, you must have goals, and you must have a map telling you how to get to your destination. You can do whatever you want to as long as you focus on it, keep your mind on it, and don't give up. I wanted to be a writer, and that's eventually what I became. Through meandering and hook and crook, I eventually became a wordsmith. I succeeded because I didn't give up on my dream, and that's because I decided at various points in my life to do the things that I wanted to do, to do the things that made me happy. So, I would tell a young person to discover the things that make you happy. What is it that you enjoy doing, that you would do even if you weren't paid for it and would still enjoy it? Whatever it is, that's what you pursue. If its cooking, if its gardening, it doesn't matter. Just do it!

### Reflections on the Profiles

One of the participants very succinctly summed up his experience of higher education by repeating the words of an African proverb which says "if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Metaphorically speaking, higher education, for more than a quarter of a century has been engaged in a similar constructive

project of mapping out a path, a direction intended to assist students to succeed. This effort has resulted in the development and creation of many very fine and noble initiatives with a primary focus of creating access to higher education and opportunity for success. The effort acknowledges the years of success higher education has achieved in constructing the ideal programs in order to shape the "perfect educated man". That is, an individual which conforms, or falls within an acceptable range of conformity to an imaginary ideal.

Over the past thirty years higher education has made progress in reaching out to previously excluded groups, and bringing those groups into the country's institutions of higher education in which the student body is predominantly white. Although this progress was not without the organized and persistent pressure from these disenfranchised groups, institutions of higher education acknowledged and accepted the challenge. Increased opportunities took the form of recruitment of minorities, open admissions, establishment of programs focusing on African American, Asian, Latin/Puerto Rican, women's Studies (Astin, 1982, p. 4). These programs, I believe were attempts to balance the dominating emphasis on European Studies at the exclusion of others. African Americans, men and women, were at the forefront of the struggle, which often included demonstrations and protest, leading colleges to "acknowledge the unmet claims of minorities in the U. S. and the inequitable treatment they had received from the educational system" (Astin, 1982, p. 4).

It was with knowledge and experience of the history of educating individuals that the image of success and the "road" required to achieve that success was understood. It was with a vision based on a



long history of coming to know what the successful or "perfect degree completers" should appear to be that well intended university faculty and administrators introduced programs to help the new arrivals succeed. These programs, or the "road" designed to assist many African American males were based on over two centuries of experience gained by European Caucasian males experienced in educating European Caucasian males, surely this well traveled road will successfully guide all its travelers. The programs, particularly those designed for African Americans, were influenced by nearly two centuries of slavery followed by nearly a century of legal separation of the races. Not only did statutes legally separate the races, they defined African Americans as inferior and relegated them to a status inferior to that of Caucasians. Given these circumstances, it should not be difficult to understand that the "road" leading to success or the various support systems designed to help African Americans would include activities to address stereotypes based on certain concerns as social, academic, and cultural developmental needs.

As I read the transcripts and listen to the words of the participants, I realized a sense of disappointment with the support or retention programs in place to assist these persisters. Several of the participants did not view these programs as helpful nor as being able to address their needs. One participant indicated that his dealings with the support programs was for there "social" attraction. He went on to criticize these programs for interfering in the private lives of students. This was expressed by Nick M. when he said that "they received copies of your grades and I guess other shit that they weren't entitled to." He went on to say that "I pretty much

structured my own support system or retention program." I have an uneasiness about the programs. They have proven to be very costly, divisive and more importantly, they have failed one of the very populations they were designed to help. Failure is most evident amongst these African American males. Many of the participants recognized that and I believe, avoided these intended helpful efforts for fear of becoming one of their casualties. One participant stated that:

"the Urban Ed program, I believe, could have saved a lot of us, white and Black students. Retention of students was the theory behind Urban Ed at the time but it wasn't run well, it was just a structure without any guts, without anything inside of it. We were affiliated with that program, it got us into school, it would get us tutors if we needed them, there was a cadre of sympathetic professors that went out of their way to help that student population but that was it. ... It's like this, You are up there bullshitting and nobody is checking up on you, you just play yourself right out of the old opportunity and that's what happened to most of the (African American students) brothers and sisters. The Urban Education program failed many students. It provided an open door and left you standing. The program claimed you as theirs---I imagined they were hoping for successes (degree completion) in order to claim credit - I am not sure if they claimed responsibility for the failures."

We have witnessed the steady decline of degree completion rates amongst African American males. It must also be noted that women in this group outnumber males in degree completion at nearly every level of higher education. This is of special interest since women degree completers in this group nearly double male degree completers. According to The Almanac of Higher Education (1994), men degree completers outnumber female degree completers in all reported groups except African Americans. One would applaud this effort except for the fact that African American females, on average, fall far below Asian and Caucasian females. This phenomenon is also seen at the high school level as reported in most studies. African American females

complete high school at much higher rates than African American males. Such data are compounded by the fact that these males are frequently the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors, and administrators. Educators may expect to encounter academic and social problems from African American males, which often leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Washington & Lee, 1982).

Like the participants in this study and others sharing similar concerns, higher education's project may have been doomed to failure from the start. The true "road" designed to produce the perfect degree completer exists only as an ideal in another's vision which is shaped by generalization transposed upon individuals. Perhaps the following quotation is the experience that many African American males can relate to, just as the five persisters you have come to know and those that will be included in chapter v as a part of the analysis.

"Universities send conflicting signals that further hamper students' ability to deal with the extraordinary academic and social pressures. Black students who receive special financial aid or academic assistance get the message that 'special' is inferior, that they do not deserve to be at the predominantly white university. The badge of inferiority is then pinned on all Black students, including those of the highest academic ability and those with no financial need. At the same time, the universities signal Black students to downplay their racial identity, frowning on Black societies, Black dormitories, Black dining hall tables, a sense of Black Self."

D. H. Smith, 1980, p. 19



## CHAPTER V

### DATA PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine persistence in college degree completion for African American males that graduated from institutions in which the student body was predominantly white. It attempted to explore and describe the relationship between successful African American male persisters and how they identify, define, use and/or exclude university and community resources and their experiences in persisting to degree completion.

This presentation and analysis of data will help us understand what I characterize as persistence among the study participants. The data is comprised of the experience and knowledge of the participants. The following section will explore what I consider to be the most salient and consistent themes that emerge from the data. I will attempt to make clear my interpretations and insights. However, it is my hope that retention practitioners, faculty, administrators, researchers and others interested in this topic, blend their own interpretation and insight into the words of this study. It is my hope that I will be able to avoid broad generalizations about the experiences of the participants, and instead, to rely on my comments to serve as a framework of ideas and thoughts designed to inform those examining this research, adding needed insight for future research. In otherwords, I will make every effort not to overgeneralize, but freely make an insight which is useful, as needed.

I will identify themes to articulate the consistent threads which appear across the experiences described by the persisters. These themes are not simply compilations of responses to questions asked during the interview, or information found in my field notes. They are the themes of the composite stories about the experience of persistence to degree completion at four-year institutions in which the student body is predominantly white.

Attention will be devoted to the concept of succeeding, not only because it was the most central theme to all interviews but, I believe, the underlying message the study participants conveyed was one of individual achievement and success. I believe all participants in this study would agree that they were indeed successful.

As the data is reviewed, analyzed and discussed within the framework of the stated goals for this study, it will be made clear that the accomplishment of degree completion by these persisters represent examples of individual achievement and success. My choice of phenomenological, in-depth interviews as a methodology, I believe, serves that purpose best, because it allows those voices that have been silent in educational research to come forth and serve to potentially influence future educational research. Every effort will be made to avoid any intrusive altering of the participants' words. The intent is to consistently maintain the spirit of the aims of phenomenology, according to Van Maanen (1990), when he states that "it brings us in more direct contact with the world...without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it" (p. 9).

The primary concern of this study was to explore what significant characteristics successful African American male

persisters may have in common, and how they identify, define, use and/or exclude university and community resources and their experiences in persisting to degree completion. In chapter one I indicated that the three major related goals for the study were:

- 1) the first was to identify self-reported factors which were experienced as barriers in the success of African American male college graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities.
- 2) the second was to discover the conditions, programs and resources African American males self report as significant positive factors that influenced their persistence to degree completion.
- 3) the third was to gain an in-depth understanding of their overall college experience, in order to determine to what extent African American males are able to make progress in the face of perceived barriers based on their perception of race based inequality.

In the following pages, study findings will be outlined and summarized and themes will be offered from the five participants introduced in chapter four and the eleven additional interviewees in so doing. Individual profiles were created from interview data in the previous chapter, and the collective data from all participants will be used in this chapter to underscore the issues relating to the successes participants commented on during the interviews.

It is not my intent that the reader take these thematic presentations for results from structured interviews with specific questions asked of a larger sample or as empirical research. The words of the participants will not be presented in the form of results. Instead, the thematic statements from the participants should be reviewed as connected "phenomena." They represent the experiences of a number of degree completers, organized around topics and themes which this researcher has created. In developing themes,



and selecting excerpts every effort will be made to avoid taking the participants' words out of context and hopefully they would agree with the connections. I recognize that as a researcher it is my responsibility to interpret the data. I believe in the case of thematic data, more so than in profiles, researchers identify connections that otherwise may not have been made. In this chapter the voices of the participants will be added as the evidence, much as one would cite noted scholars and experts, to support their claims.

The Involvement and Performance table in chapter three (3) will provide useful information on the sixteen African American males included in this study for analysis. As described in chapter 3, a total of twenty-five degree completers participated in this study, all transcripts were coded, but only sixteen were also sorted and cataloged by themes.

In addition to the individuals introduced in Chapter IV through the five profiles, we now hear from an additional eleven participants:

Alonzo C. - a city planner and an adjunct university professor who grew up in the northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from Brockport University. He was raised in a two parent family household with his brother and sister. Alonzo is now in his 30s, is single and resides in the northeast.

Edwin P. - an electrical engineer who grew up in the northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from SUNY at Buffalo. He was raised in a two parent family household until his mother's death and moved in with his uncle and aunt at the age of nine or ten. Edwin is single and resides in the northeast.

Fred D. - a CPA, tax attorney and partner with a very large accounting firm who grew up in the northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from Hofstra University. He was raised in a two parent family household with his sister. Fred is now in his 30s is married and resides in the northeast with his wife and daughter.

Lacy J. - an attorney and the deputy director of a state agency who grew up in the mid-west and earned his undergraduate degree from Wesleyan University. Lacy, now in his early 40s was raised

in a two parent household with his brother. He is married and now resides in the northeast with his wife and children - Lacy C. Johnson died on March 12, 1996 (March 5, 1954 - March 12, 1996) shortly before I completed chapter v of this study.

Miguel A. - the director of a pre-trial legal advocacy program grew up in a northeastern city and earned his undergraduate degree from St. Johns University. Miguel the youngest of four children, now in his 40s, was raised in a two parent family household. Now in his 40s, he is married and resides in the northeast with his wife and children.

Norman B. - a college administrator who grew up in the midwest and earned his undergraduate degree from Louis University. Norman, now in his 40s, was raised in a single parent home with 9 brothers and sisters. He is married and now resides in the northeast with his wife and children.

Richard S. - a sales and marketing manager with a large electrical products company who grew up in the northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from Syracuse University. He was raised in a single parent household with his three brothers and two sisters. Richard, now in his 30s, is divorced and resides in the northeast.

Ron D. - an engineer who grew up in the northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from Pratt Institute of Technology. He was raised in a two parent family household with his brother and sister. Ron, now in his 20s, is married and resides in the northeast with his wife and child (born in August 1995).

Sean P. - a supervisor in a state agency who grew up in a northern eastern city and earned his undergraduate degree from Boston University. Sean, now in his 30s, was raised in a two parent household with his sister. His parents are very successful business people having had the resources to send both children to private schools from K - college degree completion. He is single and rents a studio apartment from his parents in a northeastern city.

Steven R. - an attorney who grew up in the northeast and earned his undergraduate degree from SUNY at Oneonta. He was raised in a two parent family household with his older brother. Steven, now in his 40s, is married and resides in the northeast with his wife.

Tony W. - a court administrator who grew up in a northeastern city and earned his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University. Tony, now in his 30's, was raised in a single parent household with his sister. He was selected by A Better Chance (ABC) to enroll in the Canterbury School, a private boarding school where he completed his pre-college education. He is single and resides in the northeast.

The eleven transcripts were reviewed and marked for themes as were the five participant profiles presented in the previous chapter. From this process themes and implications emerged which are discussed below and supported with the words of the participants fully interspersed in the narrative. There were three dominant themes found in all of the stories of the participants. The theme which, I believe, embraced all others conveyed the message that the study participants believed that they always knew they would succeed, that is, complete college. Although they conveyed the message that they were always aware that college was in their future, they were unaware of how they came to know and understand, what I will call 'the idea of college', prior to entering junior high school. This theme of succeeding in college, metaphorically speaking, was usually conveyed by the participants as "certainty of intentions". Generally speaking, I would characterize "certainty of intentions" as being a major factor in becoming a successful degree completer. A second major theme, which is related to the first, is the importance of values in maintaining focus and moving toward task completion. As with the second theme, the third and final theme is one of discovering the "road" to take in order to succeed. Within the themes, several patterns are observed with a high degree of consistency and frequency among all participants which will be examined.

I will arrange these data in a way which will allow for a discussion and understanding of those issues of value across the experiences of all participants. In order to prepare the reader to formulate initial questions concerning what is believed to be



needed/necessary for African American males to successfully persist to college graduation, I will share some of my observations from the analysis.

One of the more telling findings found was the number and frequency of reported experiences of discouragement encountered by these African American males. Twenty-two of the twenty-five interviewees, and fourteen of the study participants reported what they believed to be discouragement in their college experience. I believe reporting on some of these findings initially, followed by a more in-depth analysis, relying on the words of participants as my documentation will provide a framework and background information to allow the reader to become familiar with self reported obstacles and, perhaps, begin look to discover those factors leading to the success of these study participants. This approach, I believe, is best accomplished by first focusing on self reported barriers to persistence which interfered in the success of the study participants. The focus will then turn to adaptation to barriers and discouragement; resources, conditions and programs participants self reported as significant positive factors which influenced their persistence to degree completion; and finally, I will close with a discussion of the extent to which they were able to make progress in the face of perceived barriers based on their perception of race inequality.

## Persistence in the face of barriers and Challenges

"I felt excluded, I didn't really feel as though I belonged. My white instructors never appeared terribly interested in what I had to say, never giving me a chance to showcase my knowledge. They never listened, white students and instructors never listened they just stared ..."

Richard S.

### Introduction

The personal stories of determination and persistence in degree completion, as told by these African American males, resonate with a resolve which characterize an experience of pain, sacrifice, and humbling humiliation. These stories depict a journey from the inner-city, the comfort of suburbia, and yet for others, prisons, to colleges and universities where they face a stern and persistent challenge to their belief system. The challenge to what many of these students have come to know may not only bring into question what they have learned from their families, church and community elders, but bring into question the credibility of the institutions that played a significant role in their early learning. Perhaps it is what Johnson (1974) refers to as the African Americans' experience in higher education when he states that it "educates them away from themselves."

African American male college students not only find themselves at risk due to their own action or inaction, but organizations also put them at risk of leaving college. For example, as we will see later in this chapter, were structural factors on the campuses, in the community and family that challenged the study participants efforts to persist to degree completion. As we will, see this group of persisters reported on many of the challenges which started prior to

entering elementary school and continued, in a variety of forms, throughout their pre-college and college experiences. Their voices will tell us of their individual and collective experience of very real problems encountered on the journey to becoming a college degree completers on campuses where the student body was predominantly white. One of the more frequently repeated experiences of discouragement occurred between faculty and the study participants, in and out of the classroom.

#### Where does it Start?

According to Tinto (1993) the classroom is the campus community which leads to the involvement of students in all other aspects of campus life. He suggests that colleges consist of many communities of learning, social and academic, comprised of students, staff and faculty. Involvement in the campus communities, especially those that are directed toward student learning, is the vehicle through which student learning and development occur and persistence arises. Classroom involvement leads to an understanding of the importance of integration for student development which in turn manifests itself in persistence (Tinto, 1993, p. 132). 'Nowhere is the importance of student involvement more evident than in and around the classrooms of the college ... by their very nature, classrooms are located at the very heart of the academic community of the college.' They serve as smaller academic meeting places that integrate the diverse faculty and student communities of the college (Tinto, 1993, p. 133).

The critical importance of the classroom interaction between faculty and students is crucial to the persistence of students.



Unintended statements, behaviors or references by well meaning faculty members may serve to determine how students will go about selecting courses, joining campus clubs and organizations, and preparing for classes. Classroom discussions, if not sensitive to cultural and differences in students' life experiences, may serve to discourage the persistence of African American students (Elam, 1983; Altbach and Lomotey, 1991; Tinto, 1993). The following statement made by Sean P. is but one example of a teacher student exchange interpreted as words and behavior of discouragement:

my sociology instructor was listening to the opinions of a white male classmate from New York City when he (the classmate) said that 'you never want your female relatives to become stranded in Harlem, those guys are treacherous.' I found the comments to be insensitive and racially motivated. The instructor listened with apparent interest and he and the class laughed after the student finished - my mother work in Harlem and I have several male and female relatives living Harlem, they have never encountered these 'treacherous guys' that this student described. That discussion was not at all comfortable for me - it was very discouraging that the instructor would show approval of the comments by laughing. I decided at that point that I should maintain my distance from the instructor and my classmates.

Although the instructor did not comment on the student's observations, his laughter demonstrated behavior which was accepting of such a gross generalization. Perhaps the behavior of the instructor does not deserve to be given equal weight to that of the student's comments, but it is fair to expect a university instructor to ask eighteen and nineteen year old freshmen questions for clarification rather than give tacit approval to the characterization of a community where the "guys are treacherous." Sean P. explained that he did not challenge the student's observations because "the instructor listened with apparent interest and he and the class laughed after the student

finished." He viewed the statement as "racist" and could not separate the instructor from "ownership or at least agreement with the student's opinions ...".

As noted earlier, Tinto and others suggest that involvement in the classroom is the campus community which leads to the involvement of students in all other aspects of campus life. The social involvement of students in the campus community is important to this age group, irrespective of race and gender. These young adolescents entering college are usually interested in dating, joining clubs and organizations, competing with their peers, and seeking affirmation of achievement. As we will see, these opportunities may not be as apparent to certain students because of their, real or imagined, perception of the existence of factors impeding their social and academic growth. This was certainly the case with the study participants.

Not everyone felt positive about certain aspects of their college experience, and in fact there were very real problems encountered on the road to earning a college degree. After reading this analysis, the reader will have read the words of the participants, clearly demonstrating that they had immediate responses to questions about barriers and challenges to their persistence: all participants attended historically white colleges; study groups that tend to form in the classroom around assignments were not readily available for these young men; classroom discussions failed to include their life experiences or recognize their classroom contributions; assigned advisors did not appear to demonstrate interest in the success of African American students. Other factors, although related

to the above, are less obvious at first glance. The factors include participants' response to their classroom experiences; to what extent did the classroom influence their perception and involvement in other campus communities; the extent that preconceived ideas concerning their academic preparation and ability to do college level work influence the behavior of their white classmates and instructors; participant initiated strategies for dealing with classroom problems.

The fact that these participants made numerous comments concerning the existence of barriers and challenges centering around the classroom is not surprising, considering that all of these institutions as historically white colleges and universities had over the years developed a campus and classroom culture specifically geared to meet the needs of white, primarily male, students. Over the decades these institutions have served the intended population well, but failed to recognize and respond to the challenges a changing student body required. Thus, the failure of a few new arrivals would not reflect negatively on the institution. Surely the individual, not the institution, must be deficient if they are unable to succeed. As we will learn later from the words of the participants, failure to comply with the requirements and succeed in college support programs (retention programs), often, sends a message casting doubt on a student's ability to compete at the college level.

These data are my categorization of interviews relating to barriers and challenges the participants encountered in the academy. The concerns available for discussion are numerous, but I have decided to focus on three broad areas which I believe best represent the ideas



and intent the participants communicated. They are: Encountering Discouragement; Finding A Way to Succeed; Remembering where the Journey Started.

### The experience of not Belonging: Discouragement as a Barrier

When African American students make decisions to attend historically white colleges and universities, they should be aware that attending these institutions of higher learning means living, learning, and surviving in the college community. This is not always an easy task for many African American male graduates of urban, predominantly Black and Puerto Rican, high schools. Perhaps it is just as difficult for those males who have graduated from predominantly white high schools. Study participants who attended predominantly white high schools reported that they have either resided in the city while traveling to the suburbs to attend school or maintained close friendships with other African Americans through church, clubs, athletics, relatives, and associations with other African American students attending the same high school. The college experience for thirteen of the sixteen study participants represented their first experience of being a minority group member, sharing a room with white roommates, or not being recognized for some outstanding quality. I hasten to add that young white males may have similar experiences of little or no exposure to African American males as roommates or not being recognized for some outstanding quality; however, it is of tremendous importance to be in an environment where most of your peers, faculty and administrators share many life experiences in common.

Indeed, there were various comments about being totally immersed in a predominantly white community. Comments dealing with feelings of not belonging was attributable to various forms of discouragement. Fourteen of the sixteen participants stated that their experience of discouragement was greatest at the college and/or university level. A representative number of comments from transcripts of participants, dealing with discouragement, will be discussed later in this chapter.

The study participants shared their feelings of not belonging in such detail that this researcher had to constantly make note that these events occurred over twelve years ago for the youngest and over forty years ago for the oldest of the twenty-five interviewees. As I listened to their words, I had the feeling that they were sharing experiences, indelibly etched in their memories as painful but useful reminders, that helped them develop strategies to assist in their determination to persist.

Being made to feel as though they did not belong was very difficult for the study participants to excuse or forgive. It is important to remember that these are feelings that they had come to understand as resulting from discouragement while in the first and second semesters of their freshman year of college. The problem was compounded, according to thirteen of the sixteen study participants, by the fact that they believed the faculty intentionally, in certain instances and unintentionally in others, participated in causing their feelings of uneasiness. Richard S. was terribly bothered by this feeling of not belonging, a feeling that he experienced during the third or fourth week of his freshmen year. He tells us that:

During the first few weeks of my freshman year, two of my white instructors never acknowledge my attempts to be a part of the

class discussions. They behaved as though I was invisible, so I would wait until someone finished (talking) and make my comments - that's what the white males would do. When I spoke, a silence would come over the class; it was strange, very strange. When I finished it was as though I never made a comment. The instructor and students would continue with their lively and inclusive (Richard laughs and comment, inclusive for the white students) discussion. I felt excluded, I didn't really feel as though I belonged. My white instructors never appeared terribly interested in what I had to say, never giving me a chance to showcase my knowledge. They never listened, white students and instructors never listened they just stared, they stared as though I was wasting valuable class time. I knew that it had nothing to do with my lack of preparation since this was during the first two or three weeks of class and the two instructors didn't start with class assignments until the beginning of the third week. I realized that my success depended on me making certain decisions about surviving this experience.

Richard was sharing an experience of feelings brought about by his perception of what was happening to him in the classroom. On the surface it would appear to be difficult to understand how an eighteen year old college freshmen would make decisions designed to help him persist to degree completion based on such limited contact with the students and instructors. Perhaps he would have been better served in his determination to succeed in college by continuing his attempts to gain recognition. Instead, he acted on his belief that he should limit his classroom involvement and avoid participation unless he was requested to do so. Richard credits this strategy and other steps taken for what he states as "...success in completing my degree". Without the voices of other successful African American male persisters sharing similar experiences, Richard's strategy would appear to be not only hasty but risky.

The following statement by John J., after listening to a professor and student discussing the hair color of the student's father (the student had red hair and the instructor inquired as to the



color of his father's hair) is but another example of how a faculty student exchange, although appearing innocent, negatively influenced John J's willingness to participate in classroom discussions. He tells us that:

I believed then, as now, that teachers of any race or cultural background should speak to all students in the same language, so to speak, about things that are happening within the classroom. Outside of that realm (classroom discussions), especially when the experiences of students are so different, I really couldn't deal with it. Obviously the teachers felt more comfortable speaking with students who had something in common with their experience of growing up, what they did as kids, where did daddy go to college, and other things such as that. Personally, I felt locked out of those conversations.

John J. is speaking to his experience of exclusion and isolation which has a history extending far beyond his brief stay on the college campus. It is an experience which gained meaning and significance as he witnessed subtle forms of exclusion over a number of years. Of course this kind of interpretation and response to a particular set of circumstances can happen in any situation when groups have limited and in some situations, separate life experiences to one another. This participant was expressing concern over the emphasis and value placed on those things that highlight our differences rather than those things that highlight our sameness. John J. was reacting to his feeling that the classroom was being used as a forum for informal discussions of class, gender, and race - his concern dealt more with the idea of what we have been taught to value in appearance, character, and lifestyle. John was also responding to the absence of a level playing field, a desire for a forum which would allow him to feel that he was viewed by the instructor as someone special. I imagine that John, as other eighteen and nineteen year old adolescents, viewed the instructors comments as a form of acceptance

if not favoritism. Thus, the perception was that the student with "red hair" was able to connect with the instructor in a way that excluded John J., giving this student a special relationship with the faculty member. If we are to continue the practice of encouraging students during their elementary and secondary education to be competitive and work hard to impress teachers, an equal opportunity must exist for all students to be judged fairly or in a manner which does not convey selective interest in students.

Discussions such as the one described above are not necessarily problematic, particularly since most other students would not have red hair or parents with red hair. I believe the problem arises when we look at history of our treatment and response to individuals of African ancestry. Our history suggests that this population has not been respected or treated with a sense of fairness and equality. I believe the casual observer of American history from 1609 to present would agree. In fact the discussion content was viewed as inappropriate. Fred D., having experienced a similar classroom discussion, stated that:

"it was very white (Fred laughs) - I am never sure of the correct terminology in these instances - or should I say it was very European of this professor to engage in this type discussion."

Not all study participants found non-inclusive classroom discussions as easily dismissed as Fred D.

It was troubling, but not unexpected to hear Ron D. state what eight other study participants had implied. He tells us that:

"...our white instructors made us feel as though we represented the very opposite of all of the physical, lifestyle, and ancestral characteristics valued by Europeans. I recall very distinctly this one professor telling a rather intelligent student of mixed parentage, African and European, that 'you

must be very proud of your good looking European features and intelligence.' This man accused me of being overly sensitive when I asked what did he mean by 'European features'. This student, although of European and African ancestry was not accepted in the social circles of white students, nor do I believe he sought that acceptance - he identified himself as African American. My point is that I was the most intelligent student in my engineering program, if grades determine intelligence, having maintained the top grade point average from undergraduate through the doctoral level - I have completed all of my studies at the top of my class. These comments are not planned or thought out, they are endemic, that is why they are so dangerous.

John J. expressed similar concern for the treatment he experienced from his teachers. He tell us that:

...teachers were not very supportive and in the classroom the white students got better treatment. This treatment was obvious to all of us and my friends often talk about it when we get together. The teachers interacted more with them in ways that they didn't with me; they would call on white students more often than they did with me; some of them could relate to teachers much better in a number of ways than I could ever possibly relate. What I mean is when it came to life experience topics such as: where are you going on vacation this summer? where are your grandparents from? does your father or mother have red hair? --- you get the picture (JJ laughs). That's not a conversation I would participate in, realizing that those were not some of the things that I considered to be culturally relevant to some of us. My hair is cut different, I go to the barber shop here they go to a different place; they might frequent the same restaurants as the teachers, I was not involved in any of that and did not feel as though it was an appropriate conversation.

Other comments from study participants made clear their belief that the instructors deliberately acted in a manner designed to discourage them. Mike O. shares his experience of not participating in class because he felt intimidated.

He considered himself to be a good student with good ideas but his instructor had certain ideas and expectations of him that he did not necessarily fulfill. He tells us that:

I think the attitude with this one professor in particular was that I didn't bring the level of scholarship to my work that he thought was appropriate. He tried to fail me ... I read



everything they put in front of me, everything, and would sit there and wait until somebody would come up with some ideas that I had about the text, but that seldom happened. I can remember, for instance, we were studying Beowulf and, for me, what I saw in the text was the beginning, the seeds of fascism that found fruition in Hitler. But that kind of interpretation of the text, I think they (white faculty and students) viewed it as extremely far fetched. I guess a part of it was that (they felt) I was not studying my culture. I mean, I'm studying a culture that's alien, that's foreign to me, so I didn't have that kind of instinctive feel for the text that he would have.

Mike O. was very adamant in his comments that two or three of his instructors only expected a certain level and quality of contribution from him, displaying displeasure when he exceed those limits.

Miguel A., now an attorney in Manhattan, described his experience of discouragement as one that remained with him throughout his legal education and he continues to be bothered by that form of discouragement. He stated that:

when I got there (St. Johns University) they showed me my scores, they pretty much told me to forget about law school, that law school was not me. When I asked why, they said 'well, according to the test you took you'd be better off as a priest or social worker than you would as a lawyer. That totally blew me away, because here I am going to school thinking I will try and prove myself and get something that my mother always wanted for herself, a law degree, but she was only able to graduate from high school. Now there I was, first year, my first couple of months at St. Johns, in an isolated environment where I am away from my neighborhood, away from my family, and people are already discouraging me from pursuing what I thought I wanted to do. So it was a drastic blow to me. I felt repercussions from that for the next two years, it affected my college life. But I refused to give up.

Just as we learned from Mike O. and John J., Miguel was sharing his belief that he was not given a fair opportunity to compete. He sincerely believed that he could succeed in a pre-law program and complete a law degree. The counselor's advice was not valued and he planned his own degree program in order to accomplish his goal. Miguel was unwilling to accept this encounter with his counselor

as simply the practice of concerned and helpful advising. He viewed it as the counselor's "preconceived notion of what certain people are suited for in their professional work."

The words of the participants offer compelling evidence of discouragement which they report as something that faculty and staff did to them or allowed to be done to them. Their interactions with faculty, particularly in and around the classroom represented the most troubling experiences. Any one of these experiences examined in isolation would simply be viewed by this researcher, and I suppose others, as insignificant at best and poor judgment at worse. The collective accounts of experiences of discouraging words, behavior, patterns of exclusion, and advice were reported by twenty-two African American male graduates of twenty different historically white colleges and universities.

We heard from Mike O. and Miguel A. that they believed their experiences of discouragement were the result of preconceived beliefs about their ability. Now we will hear from yet another study participant describing his experience of discouragement with a faculty department concerning what he believed to be preconceived ideas about his intellectual ability.

Edwin P. tells us that:

...my first semester I didn't do that well, I did a lot better my second semester because I knew I needed a very high GPA to get into the engineering department. I think I had a 3.7 or something like that the second semester. I eventually applied to the engineering, economics, and mathematics departments and was accepted to all three. I wanted a double major in mathematics or economics and engineering. At the end of my junior year I went to visit the Dean of the Mathematics Department, Weber Cohen, Dr. Cohen. I went to visit him in his office to ask a couple of questions about the program that I



wanted to pursue - electrical engineering combined with mathematics and an emphasis in economics. I didn't want to do straight economics. I wanted to do something they called mathematical-economics. I explained my interest and he said, 'do you realize that you need a very high GPA to get into this department.' I said that I don't understand why you're telling me this because I think I am accepted in this department, economics and engineering based on my grade point average including grades for all prerequisite course work. This man's comment was 'are you sure you have met all of the requirements to be accepted in the department?' I tried to maintain my cool but I had to tell him, Dr. Cohen I would not want to waste your time or my time by asking you questions; wouldn't it be a lot easier for you to pull my record and take a look at my grades. Before I realized it I said, you will see that I have been accepted for a double major by the electrical engineering chair and I don't know if you realize that you need a 3.0 to get into the electrical engineering, but simply a 2.5 for mathematics. After pulling my report he looked at it and observed that I had all As in math except for one C. He said oh you have a C in one of those math classes. I said what does that have to do with anything sir? Out of sixteen credits in math I all A's and one C, doesn't that give grade point above 3.0 for math. He finally said 'well, we can see what you can do...I am going to follow you for one more additional semester before I decide. I went there to get his signature because it was needed for the joint program, not to listen to all of his nonsense based on his feelings concerning the intellect of Black people. I simply walked out of his office and took a double major in electrical engineering and economics. I was sure that he would eventually accept me in the program, but I didn't want to expose myself to that very destructive and discouraging type of individual, since I knew of whites that had been accepted by him with lower math and overall grades. I earned my masters in electrical engineering and math from the same university.

Not all students found the response from white students and faculty to be without some basis. At least one student indicated that Black students at his school had a history of poor academic performance which accounted for the belief that they were unable to do college level work. He also noted that a few African American students shared this opinion. John A., in discussing a period when his academic performance was falling below the college acceptable level, states that:

Somewhere along the way in college I lost that (confidence)..., the opposite occurred; I started doubting myself. It was



tough for me to figure out what caused the shattering of my confidence...we were constantly being told that they were weeding out the people who couldn't cut it...the message was for all students but amongst the Black campus community it was taken to another level because so many Blacks had tried to do well and failed...there was a stigma of poor performance, of mediocre performance amongst the Black community. I believe the faculty sort of expected the Black students to do poorly. As I reflect back, I can think of cases where my ability was discounted before I even had a chance...as a result...you can either step up to the plate and show your stuff or go to the back of the classroom and just sit there like a bump on a log. I think I did that for a while, I kind of accepted the latter as my role...there were some professors who acted on the belief that the college admitted all of these Black students...and they don't really belong here. There was also a feeling that you had that there was something racial underlying these statements. In general, I sensed that white students felt as though Black students were there on campus because of some special effort on the part of the college to bring them in as opposed to their ability and their merit getting them there. As a matter of fact, other Black students shared this feeling...

Perhaps Mike O. captured the frustration and confusion that all of these persisters must have struggled with during their college experience. In describing his experience of discouragement at the college level he was somewhat more reflective on the entire experience as indicated in the following statement:

I got through the program (his college major) and graduated but it didn't have to be so painful and difficult. White students don't realize how easy they have it, not being burdened with the racial, social and political problems which confront so many of us (African American students) daily.

It must be pointed out that at least one student employed a strategy of continued participation in classroom discussions, forcing recognition. Nick tells us that:

In the classroom, I made my contribution. Although the faculty did not appear to be supportive, I continued to make my contribution. Faculty did not give the personal attention because there was too many cracks, it was too big. But I pressed my case you know and got to know quite a few professors, some of them, one of them anyway remained my friend up to this very minute. I frequently called him for advice after I graduated.

## Adaptation and Persistence

### Introduction

The study participants not only had to develop strategies for surviving discouragement encountered in the classroom community, they had to decide how and to what extent they would become involved in: other campus communities; friendships with males and females; participation in recreational and social activities; use of university resources for study and classroom preparation; obtaining funds for tuition, housing and personal use. Again, managing what would appear to be excessively weighty responsibilities for adolescents represented additional challenges that they were able to successfully overcome. Many students, of all races and backgrounds, take on similar responsibilities and accomplish them quite successfully. Students enter college with the expectation of succeeding and the belief that everyone expects nothing short of success, in this instance, degree completion. That may not be the case for many African American students, and as we have seen the participants included in this study had an entirely different experience. They were expected to fail. As the participants reported, not only were they not expected to succeed, discouragement was encountered by most.

Adaptation was a quality that these persisters understood and as we discovered earlier, used to their advantage. I will now turn my attention to the financial, social, and racial barriers these persisters faced.

### Making ends Meet: Financing Schooling

In many respects the study participants reported far less discouragement when discussing the financial aspect of a college

education. Twenty-one of the twenty-five interviewees experienced difficulty financing their college education. Thirteen indicated that they considered dropping out of college to work a semester or two, however only two exercised that option but returned after a semester.

Richard S., one of the participants who dropped out of school to work, shared his experience of financing his education by drawing from his childhood experience. He spoke of financing an education as being difficult but a situation that he could manage. Familiarity with, and adaptation to, these circumstances was based on their experience in families where they had grown up poor. Richard S. tells us that:

I have been poor all of my life (Richard laughs), until recently, I grew up in a housing project, Goldbas Housing Projects. At the time I didn't know that we were poor. I guess it was a working class neighborhood and there were poor people living there - we happened to amongst the poorest. When I say that we were poor, in retrospect, I understand that my mother was not able to or she didn't really have access to a lot that, I think, most people today would consider to be essentials. We didn't have a lot in the way of food, clothes, space - we had two bedrooms for five boys, two girls and my mother - money to pay the bills, especially gas and electric. I can remember us being on welfare receiving assistance, getting food, you know the welfare cheese, milk and types of food. We lived in six different apartments when I was growing up, from as early as I can remember until tenth grade, and in retrospect Goldbas was the nicest. I believe that that experience helped to remain level headed when faced with financial problems in college. (Richard laughs) I guess I was not smart enough to recognize an impending crisis.

Richard continued by pointing out the value of this early lesson in helping him cope with limited funds during his college years. He Tells us:

I didn't have any money when I was in college to do a lot of socializing with the other kids, go to concerts, buy a lot of clothes, and help at home. I received HEOP funding, but it didn't provide extra money. That money did not fully cover my tuition, room and board, and books. I had other financial responsibilities, helping my mom and my younger brothers and sisters. You do what you must, I left school for a semester to work and still graduated in four and one half years.



The participants reported that financing their education was something that they controlled. They appeared, personally or jointly with their families, to accept full responsibility for tuition, room and board, and personal upkeep. They identified several sources of funds available to them. Summer employment was the primary income generating source mentioned by all participants; Student loans, work study, academic scholarships, educational opportunity programs, G I Bill and athletic scholarships, were, in descending order, the other sources mentioned.

It should also be noted that forty-four percent of the sixteen study participants reported extreme conditions of poverty during their childhood. They reported that food, clothing, adequate housing, and at times housing without heat or electricity due to delinquent payments, were familiar circumstances and conditions. The idea of not being able to pay tuition, room or board was viewed as a temporary situation. They viewed difficult conditions and the absence of available opportunity as temporary inconveniences which would change. These participants were not dreamers, they realized that action on their part was necessary to improve their condition. The message so clearly communicated was that they recognized problems and developed specific action plans which allowed them to persist. They did not become immobilized when faced with difficulties; an attitude and approach which this researcher observed in the way they responded to impending harm.

As one would expect, selecting a college was heavily influenced by funding available for school expenses, personal upkeep, recreation

and social events. Steven R. is but one example of making a decision of college selection based on funding. He states that:

I was originally accepted to, and was going to The University of Wisconsin. I had also sent an application to SUNY at Oneonta, where a friend of mine was attending. At Wisconsin I would be assigned to a work study program and would have to take out a loan in addition to the grant. SUNY at Oneonta's Opportunity Program offered me a full financial aid packet so that I wouldn't have the work study or be expected to take out a student loan - it was primarily all grants. As much as I didn't want to go there, I couldn't pass it up. I went to avoid taking out a loan and participating in work study while trying to maintain a decent grade point average --- so I went to Oneonta.

According to Astin, the Higher Education Act of 1965 brought about a rapid expansion of student aid including the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG Program), BEOG was eventually replaced by PELL Grants, College work study program. Astin grouped federal programs that contributed to minority participation in higher education into four major categories; Institutional Aid Programs, Student Financial Aid Programs, Special Programs (Access and Persistence), and Professional Training and Human Resource Development.

Although student grants and loans are excluded from the chart, twenty of the students received various types of educational loans or grants. The most widely used program was work study along with other forms of financial support. Student loans were of immense importance to the participants and their families. Due in part to the variety of purposes loans were designed to meet and the relative ease found in obtaining such funds. In some instances participants were eligible and received more than one loan/grant.

The following table is a summary of institution type and the source of financial support most often reported by these persisters. Sixteen percent of the twenty-five subjects interviewed received all

of their financial support from parents and/or other family members. Twenty-two participants reported working every summer while attending college, while twenty-five worked at least two summers. Only two had to leave college for a semester for full-time employment.

Table 4

Data on Who Paid For The Study Participants' Education and The Type of Institution Attended

SOURCE OF INCOME	PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS	PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS	TOTAL
Educational Opportunity Programs	3	1	4
Family	1	3	4
AcademicScholarship/Work/Family	1	5	6
Family and Work	6	1	7
Athletic Scholarship		1	1
Self Supporting	1	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>

### The need to Belong

there were two life styles on campus, there was one that was white, there was one that was Black and if you were Black you hung out in certain circles and if you were white you hung out in certain circles and very few mixed with the other.

Fred D.

African American students experience much difficulty in their social adjustment to historically white colleges. The study participants report that they entered these institutions not expecting very much racism and an increased opportunity for social interaction



across racial lines. The enthusiasm for discovering improved understanding was gradually replaced with despair and bitterness, displayed in joining forces with other African American students for validation of their worth and involvement in social activities. This withdrawal from white students was the result of a crisis in trust. As observed in the previous comments from study participants, the classroom, to a large extent was the setting where they first experienced unwarranted reticence from their white classmates and faculty.

W.E.B. DuBois (1968 pp. 134 & 283) in discussing his social experience while at Harvard tells us that:

Of course I wanted friends, but I could not seek them. My class was large, with some 300 students. I doubt if I knew a dozen of them. I did not seek them and naturally they did not seek me. I did not seek them... I did not try to accomplish this. This was partly because of my fear that color caste would interfere with our meeting and understanding.

According to Castile (1981 p.186) members of subordinate groups need to identify with a community or neighborhood in order to persist. It provides a reference with a larger support system.

In this study, participants sought out formal and informal alliances with other African Americans immediately upon entering college. The emphasis placed on separation was common to all participants in varying degrees. Reasons for seeking out like students ranged from full acceptance of the separation ("I wanted to date Black girls") to full placement of their actions on the belief that their white classmates preferred the separation ("they (white students) really didn't want to hangout with us.") The following comment from Alonzo C. provides a glimpse of how this persister viewed separation. He states that; "most of my friends were African

American, we didn't exclude them (white students), but they just gravitated in the wrong direction." The responsibility of withdrawal, in this instance, was placed at the doorstep of his white classmates.

The act of separation usually included withdrawal from participation in many social activities, particularly those that were or appeared to be seen as involving close personal contact. Housing was most often mentioned as an area where African Americans were not only preferred but sought out. Seven of the participants stated that they requested and received permission for a roommate change during the freshman year because they wanted a Black roommate. Only one interviewee said that his request was refused and he was assigned another white roommate his sophomore year, it was his junior year when he participated in the housing "lottery" and drew two African American students as roommates.

In order not to run the risk of conveying the idea that these participants were a group of Black separatists, I must address campus conditions which they faced upon arriving at their respective colleges. I have reviewed their experience of discouragement in the classroom which, to some extent, forced them to develop a strategy for survival. Later, I will review their concerns of race based inequality, an experience that they frequently referred to as "racism". They report that in a typical day they are either "the target of racism" or "exposed to racism directed at other minority group members". These overt acts are experienced through direct confrontations or through graffiti and the acts of white fraternities and sororities. Perhaps equally as important is because these students were young and single, they were forced to decide on social

separation because of their status. Of course a solution would be to date other female group members; however, as noted in Chapter 3, Ogbu (1991) suggests that cross-race dating is unwise for a number of reasons.

The Following comments, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991 p. 644), offers some insight on the need for certain students to join forces:

It is clear that many of the most important effects of college occur through students' interpersonal experiences with faculty members and other students. It is equally clear that the academic, social, and psychological worlds inhabited by most nonwhite students on predominantly white campuses are substantially different in almost every respect from those of their white peers. On some (perhaps many) campuses, minority students feel a powerful need to band together for psychological and social support of one another, sometimes in defense against the tacit and not-so-tacit condescension and hostility some feel from white faculty, students, and staff alike. While confirming evidence may be scarce, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that under such conditions the educational experiences and outcomes of college for nonwhite students are probably also very different from those for white students, perhaps significantly so.

The need to bond with other African American students had as much to do with academic survival and persistence as it did with personal, entertainment, and recreational pursuits. There was a compelling need to survive in an environment which was not supportive and at times unfriendly. Alonzo C. recognized a need to bond with individuals that had an interest in his survival. He indicated that the collective efforts of African Americans on campus had the potential for saving students in danger of dropping out. Alonzo tells us that:

there is a need for support groups, whether they are formal or informal - when we are experiencing academic or social problems, they are to help. Many of the Black students that I talked about who did not go on (for nonacademic reasons), or forced out for academic reasons, a stronger support group may have saved some of them - allowing them to move forward. A number of the casualties would party with Black students and then party with



the white students, never setting aside time to hang with us at the library or in a Black professor's office. The collective effort of individuals that are concerned and care should be strengthened - we should have found a way to strengthen our support group (Alonzo laughs), our black enclave. The Black students and professors wanted to see all of us succeed however, I don't believe the white faculty and students gave a damn.

### The use of bonding in managing alienation, stress, isolation and academic Performance

Other participants expressed feelings of alienation brought on by the behavior of faculty observed when interacting with white students and that observed when interacting with African American students. Richard S. tells us that:

on a social level just walking around the campus, if I saw an instructor, particularly my psychology and biology instructors, if I saw them around campus they wouldn't speak. Not only would they speak to other (white) students but it seemed to me that they would go beyond speaking to other students. If a social event like a movie or a play was on campus and of interest to them, they would join the non Black, usually male students. Maybe they were members of an all white fraternity, that would explain the out of class bonding but it would not account for not speaking. The Black students that I talked to shared the same experience. That was something that we understood and it was also a dynamic that we learned to live with.

Richard explained that he not only accepted the behavior of the two faculty members, but was influenced by this behavior in generally dealing with other white male instructors:

I didn't feel comfortable approaching them. My experience was when I did have a question, or when I did approach them for either clarification or just trying to understand, they were vague responding with instruction and direction that wasn't really that clear. Now that I think about it, my division manager tends to respond to my questions in this same vague and incoherent manner - (Richard laughs) maybe it is a test to see if we really understand what we are asking. Fortunately his boss, the vice president for our product line, a white female that can't figure out his selective excursions through incoherence.

Richard concluded his comments by listing and discussing those concerns that he found to be very troublesome, creating feelings of depression and heightened anxiety that something was being done to him. He said that:

I believed there was information that many whites received that I didn't, whether that information came from instructors or groups - I believed there was a different set of expectation levels for you if you were Black as compared to white students. I don't know if they expected less or more, but it was something different. In terms of information that I didn't receive, I always had the feeling that something was not being communicated - nothing specific, just a feeling that something was not being communicated.

Feelings of stress in dealing with opportunities for social involvement was embodied in the words of many of the participants. Some of the campus environments have been described with supporting documentation of unfair treatment, exclusion, discouragement and stressful experiences resulting from a recognition of unmet needs of these participants. John A. found his environment equally stressful as Richard S, later in this chapter we will examine examples of how John and others worked toward creating a more receptive community, and makes the following observation:

life at Lafayette was pretty hard for the Black student. We were pretty much discounted, at least we felt that we were since there were no activities really designed for us. We had to do everything on our own without much support from the school. White student government leaders and their faculty advisors focused activities primarily around the white student organizations.

As previously mentioned, participants usually initiated action to change roommates if placed with a white. The reasons for concern over sharing rooms with whites were varied and did not necessarily appear to be displeasure or the lack of satisfaction with the

roommate. According to Steven R. it was sort of expected as determined from the following statement:

There were very few Black and Latino students there at the time and I shared a dormitory room with a white student from Long Island. I remember speaking on the phone with him prior to going to the school - we spoke about our backgrounds and items we were bringing to school and so forth. After the semester started I roomed with him less than one-half of the first semester and transferred to another dormitory with a Black student. A Black friend that I had met up there whose white roommate had moved out for some unknown reason. I moved in with him primarily because blacks had this expectation, really more of an unstated rule that if you were Black or Puerto Rican you did not associate or hang out with the white students you hung out with Black and Puerto Rican students. I think it was expected because of some code or camaraderie. I think it was also because there were so few of us up there and you were either one of us or you were something else. If you were Black or Puerto Rican, I guess there was no reason for you to be with a white roommate.

In discussing the reaction his white roommate displayed when he moved out, Steven tells us that:

I wasn't chased out of my room, I wasn't mistreated, in fact I got along fine with my roommate. He was very surprised and I think maybe hurt because I was moving out. I told him there was nothing wrong with him but it was something I needed to do. Remember it was at the time when the Black experience and awareness on campuses were growing and having come from a prominently Black neighborhood - although I had dealt with whites and Orientals in high school - I still enjoyed the company of other Blacks more so than whites. And I certainly did not want to be pigeon holed into being anything but what I was and that was Black.

Sean P. viewed the act of seeking out other Blacks for association and bonding as only natural. He was not necessarily troubled by what he perceived his white roommates reaction was upon discovering that they had been assigned to share a room. He stated that:

I arrived there I was placed in a room with a white boy with red hair from Maine. When he walked into that room and I said 'what's happening roomy', you should have seen the look on his face. When he saw me and realized that he had a Black roommate from New York City he almost turned a different shade of white - this guy looked like Casper - he was in shock. But luckily on my



floor, two or three doors down, were two Black students from New York City and another Black student from Louisiana. We just gravitated toward each other and became fast friends. In this place called Ward Towers, this big high rise dorm, we (Black students) just found each other. You know how these things work. Blacks just seem to gravitate to each other. I think out of a feeling of isolation - being isolated in this sea of white people that believe we are there to do them harm while they keep 'sticking it to us'. There were so few of us that we all seemed to need each other - if you are sitting alone and see some Black students you're immediately invited to join them or they will join you or get in your shit (business) if you can't explain, in a hurry, why you are not with the agenda. So luckily the first few people I met were very cool and we became fast friends.

Given the age of these persisters when they entered college, seventeen and eighteen year old adolescents, it should be expected that dating would be another major consideration, perhaps accounting for a certain part of voluntary and involuntary isolation and alienation. Dating Black females was a matter of choice, the only choice for at least fourteen of the sample, while an additional six participants expanded their preferences to include Latino and Asian females. The reasons given for dating African American women had a great deal to do with beliefs parents and other family members held, loyalty to Black women and their sense of blackness, and an awareness of the history of race and racism in this country. This sentiment was clearly stated by Marion P, a participant you were introduced to in chapter IV.

I strenuously objected to cross race dating then and I do now. The exact same problem I had with it then I have with it today. The difference now is that I am more sophisticated with my reasons... The answer then was how could you date someone who's ancestors enslaved us. Regardless of what they (White Americans) say and do, they have always had it ingrained --- they have always been taught that we are inferior, I can't fuck (I find that too confusing to deal with) with that. My answer now is the exact same thing, with the added genuine concern of how can you subject a child to a more racist society ... to spend half the time being Black and the other half being white? I am not saying that it can't be done successfully, I am only asking, how can you subject a child to that? I think you should

also remember that the bottom line is regardless of who I am and what I do, they have always been taught that I am inferior... How can I tolerate marriage to someone who at one point was taught that, regardless if they still believe it or not, they were taught this. I believe that the majority, white men and women, still believe in their superiority to Blacks (MP laughs and comments "their superiority to all non-Europeans").

John A states that he did not date white females, but did not elaborate on his reasons. He did share his feeling of loyalty and commitment to his mother and sisters and possible disappointment if he dated white females. He believed that his mother would find it completely unacceptable. Although he didn't elaborate concerning his personal reasons, it was clear that this was not an area that he viewed as acceptable for conversation. He found it difficult to understand dating or considering marriage to any non-black person.

My friends and I only dated Black females, that included Puerto Rican sisters (Black Puerto Rican females). My dating was always African American and Black Hispanic females.

Many of the participants realized that their college female relationships had the potential for leading to marriage and reproduction and they were concerned about the selection process for a variety of reasons.

We will examine the views of one additional study participant concerning his personal guidance for dating. I offer this final comment because it represents a view of three of the study participants. They shared experiencing acts of intimidation by Black male students for personal relationships with white female students.

Mike O. stated that:

There was a tendency among the Black guys there at the time, well, some of them had liaisons with white girls but it was always in the closet. But that wasn't a part of my makeup, I openly had a two-year relationship with this white girl who loved me very much, and her father was a member of the faculty; he taught psychology. I knew the Black students, and perhaps

white students, resented my openness in dating a white girl, but I was my own man and didn't care what other people thought of me.

Although learning, I believe, is the primary function of colleges and universities, the opportunity for growth development in all areas exists for students. Many of these adolescents will develop social relationships which may endure over a life time. Still Others will identify life time friends in marital partners while attending college. This becomes an area of grave concern for African American males, particularly those in this study that indicated that they did not believe in cross-race dating. Astin (p.1990), Tinto (p.1987), Pascarella & Terenzini, (1991) pointed out the important role colleges play in the social growth of students.

At the time of the interviews fifteen of the men were married and the remaining ten were either dating or engaged. Of those married: two married Latino females, one married an Asian female, one married a Caucasian female, and the remaining ten were married to African American females. Of the single and engaged men: six to African American women, two to Latino women, one to an Asian woman and one is engaged to a Caucasian female.

Participants also expressed a need to develop associations with other African Americans in order to persist in the classroom. It is important to students join groups for studying and review of classroom assignments. As discussed earlier and noted in chapter II, Tinto places emphasis on the importance of the classroom community as being the place for building and strengthen relations in other campus communities. The study participants did not believe that they were accepted into the classroom community as equal participants. They did



not gain the respect for their potential scholarship, I would believe a prerequisite for selection to participate in study groups.

This was certainly the case with Edwin P, a participant we heard from earlier, as stated in the following comment:

White and Asian students would not necessarily share their knowledge easily, they tended to avoid Black students in matters dealing with academics. So being Black and not being able to bond with people because I didn't go to bars with anyone - I really didn't enjoy my white classmates' entertainment - and I wasn't part of a fraternity, so I probably had a barrier. There were no Blacks - I mean if you could go to a decent fraternity or some kind of group like a Black student alliance or talk to some tutors that were Black - there were no Blacks in any of the engineering programs. I mean flatly, no Blacks! It was tough. I had 17 first semester credits and second semester I think I took 21 credits - and these professors are giving you lengthy lab reports to write because they must weed out the weak students - so they say. Poor little me with homework everyday, quizzes every couple of weeks, watching all those white and Asian students busy getting together just to exchange information. They would write reports on a rotating basis. One would write the report this week and the other the next week, rotating through the group. One would write the report for all group members, that is how they would work it. I would had to do all of the work by myself. If they had a quiz they would all sit down together and work together, I had to try and figure out everything by myself. What helped, at the beginning of the second semester I met Enrique, a Black student with a major in math. Well, it didn't take me long to convince that a double major, Mathematics and Electrical Engineering would work out just fine for him. I organized my own support group because the faculty, TAs and students didn't care about our survival. Frankly, they didn't think we would make it.

One participant indicated that the campus community represented opportunity, particularly in terms of housing. He viewed university housing as a tremendous equalizer, eliminating barriers of class and status. It represented an opportunity for inclusion. Lacy J. stated that "white university faculty and middle class students tend to send a message to Black students that they are not welcome, but it is because they are not sure how to interact with Black and Puerto

Students, particularly Black and Puerto Rican males." He comments that:

My college had a policy called blind admission which was important in terms of insuring the diversity of the student body. In that sense it was an eye opening and delightful experience for me to have these other nationalities represented. I chose to live in the majority campus housing (dorms) and found it to be an outstanding experience. I found college, particularly the housing experience, to be a great equalizer, because whatever you dealt with before you entered college was removed. You had a semi-block based room with a bed, desk and a dresser, that was basically it. I thought that the housing made a lot of sense, it opened the door for dialogue across class and race.

One participant found the experience in the dormitory to be free of the problems reported by others. He was able to develop relationships with all students which appeared to meet his needs. Nick said:

I found the students in my dorm to be very friendly; what I didn't realize until later, was that most of these students came from working class families and a similar background, except for, you know, they were white, they came from communities that were all white, we had very similar working class backgrounds. We had no problems, we played ball together, got high together and had lots of fun.

It is clear from the statement that this friendship, as described by this participant, was addressing special needs. Perhaps these alliances are less inhibited than those previously discussed with bonding developing around needs that many students, black and white, would find objectionable.

We will find that many acts of discouragement experienced by these participants were considered to be "racist", as described and characterized by the participants. Race inequality as a form of discouragement came from classmates, faculty, administrators, townspeople, and campus security. It was experienced by participants

in their classrooms, dormitories, at campus events, in the surrounding communities, and while walking the campus grounds.

### Considerations of race and race Inequality

Statements during the interviews revealed that participants found their colleges and universities to be unfriendly and at times, hostile. They reported that frequently interactions with white students and faculty alike, were stressful and demoralizing, and believed that this treatment was in response to their dark skin. Although Eighty-eight percent of those interviewed were very clear in reporting what they believed to be discouragement at the college level, only seventy-two percent used the terms "racist" or "racism" in describing what was being done to them. However, those participants avoiding terms such as "racist" or "racism" when describing forms of discouragement, described events and circumstances similar to the others.

Participants shared experiences of discrimination at the hands of college/university faculty, staff and students; racial insults from the on-campus and off-campus community; mistrust and avoidance; The participants were able adapt to this hostile environment where they were greeted with a barrage of verbal attacks due to their dark skin. It was inspite of all that they were forced to endure at the hands of those that openly displayed their hostility, and from those that expected inferior performance from members of this group due to their skin color, they were able to persist.

Many of the experiences reported earlier in this chapter were considered to be acts of unfairness and discrimination based entirely



on attitudes and beliefs about dark skinned people in general and African American men specifically. One account of the classroom experience was reported as behavior simply based on the comfort level and common experiences members of the faculty share with students. Ron D., in describing the problems he encountered with his white instructors, tells us that:

I had many problems with my professors in the way they related to students. I understand, if I had a Black professor I probably would identify with him more than I did with my white instructors. Our experiences would be similar in many respects, although it may only be a shared experience of interacting with whites. You know, we sort of come - even though we see a Black person from Ethiopia or where-ever, somehow there's a commonalty between us, you can feel it, we just connect. It is probably the same thing, if you are a white professor you just connect with the white students. I am not suggesting that they were prejudiced, but I don't believe that it should take place in the classroom. The one or two Black professors that I knew would ask you to stop by the office if the conversations appeared to be unrelated to the interest or excluding other students. Although my grades were always at the top of most classes, I felt that white instructors gave those (white) students a lot of breaks in terms of the grades. I can honestly say that in my experience, as far as the Blacks were concerned, whatever we got we earned it---my Black professors didn't even treat us equal, they were constantly forcing us to do more, preaching to us that 'you have to do more than your white classmates to be given their opportunities in the real world. I viewed that as tough but I knew that they cared for us as they would their own sons and daughters. After graduating and starting my job, I finally understood the message.

Earlier in this chapter Richard S. stated that he believed white students received information from the white faculty that African Americans didn't, a feeling that Ron expressed in the above statement. Richard was much more willing to label the actions, words and behavior of his white college professors, he described the acts as "racist and intentional."

Ron D. did not want to characterize the classroom behavior of his professors as prejudice or racist, falling short in this charge

but suggesting that he believed white professors gave white students a break. It is interesting that Ron felt uneasy about the interaction taking place in the classroom between white faculty and students, although his 'grades were always at the top of most classes'. An argument could be made that the faculty placed the emphasis where it was needed, with those students that needed to improve. In a similar experience reported earlier in this chapter by John J., he had no difficulty pointing out that the conversation represented a form of discouragement and had no place in the classroom. Ron and John J. felt that classroom conversations based on social relationships were not appropriate. As reported earlier, other students experienced varied forms of discouragement resulting from classroom exchanges between instructors and students.

Ron, although still reluctant to characterize the behavior he encountered as racially motivated, states that:

I recall taking five classes one semester and ending up with two. I registered for a computer class just to get me started and it was for Pascal and I didn't understand that. After the first class and I went to the Dean's office to explain my error and he said, 'well you guys', I think he lost his mind for a minute--although he didn't say it, I think he meant African Americans. He said "you guys usually try to take all these classes and have trouble passing any of them, studying a semester and then at the end you drop all of them." I didn't say anything, I just walked out and completed a drop slip and dropped most of those classes. I ended up with the Pascal class and one other. I got a B in Pascal and an A in the other class. At the end of the semester I gave the dean a copy of my transcript and said thank you, I had a good time and I transferred from computer science to engineering. I don't know if I would guess at how this man felt I don't believe he would have responded to white or Asians that way. Perhaps students from Africa and other areas populated by dark skin people --you must remember that many of the foreign students are pre-screened and they represent some of the better minds coming out of their high schools--would be treated with more respect.

It was not clear if the dean was referring to entering male first and second year students or students that fail to seek advise from assigned faculty advisors or perhaps, as Ron indicated, African American students. When Ron was asked for additional information to help this researcher understand, he said that "the dean attempted to make a comment but Ron abruptly walked-out of his office." Although the dean's comments may not have been motivated by race, they were clearly discouraging to Ron, resulting in the altering of his short and long term educational plans.

Mike O. was not reluctant to label the actions of faculty that he encountered. In sharing information concerning the discouragement from faculty which resulted in his withdrawal from unsolicited classroom participation, he states that:

I wasn't academically serious, I think part of it was the racism among some of the faculty. They just didn't appear to be accustomed to seeing a Black guy in my program. The kind of nurturing you get from a professor that really cares about your learning experience, I didn't get that with some of the professors and I could feel it.

One of the participants, in describing his experience of unfair treatment in the classroom, offered an account of what he believed to be unwarranted suspicion directed at him. Edwin P. stated that:

when I was in the last semester of my senior year , I was taking a class in micro-electronics and this professor teaching the course accused me of cheating on his final exam. What happened was this, since I almost never went to that class, a friend told me that we could write formulas on one piece of paper and bring them to class. I wrote formulas on one piece of paper, both sides of the sheet. Thirty minutes into the exam this instructor comes and stands right behind me and he says you're cheating. He said that he instructed the class to write on only one side of the sheet and added 'I know you weren't in class because you have only attended two or three of my classes.' It was a lecture style class and I was the only Black so it was fairly easy to miss me. I was so angry, tears actually started coming out of my eyes and his response was 'oh don't you try to pull that one on me, that you're crying.' I told the professor that 90% of the



class have their notes written on both sides of the paper and he told me 'that's not true'. I explained the situation and asked the first person that turned his completed exam in if he would show the instructor his paper with notes. He showed it to us and it had written comments on both sides of the paper. The next three students had written on both sides of the paper and I asked the instructor what do you want me to tell you now? He simply said 'well, maybe I made a mistake.' He asked if I wanted to continue on with the exam --- I refused. He continued to play a game with me as if I was at fault, stating that 'I could talk to the Dean about this and maybe then I could force them not to graduate you.' I said if you give me an F for that class I won't graduate anyway, why don't you grade the exam the way it is and if I get an F for the class I will drop it and stay another semester, so you'll have it made --- but I am not going to take your exam again and I walked out. I think I got a C for that class. I think this man was bitter because I was graduating at the top of my class and I never attended a number of the classes, primarily due to the attitude of a number of instructors. I do believe that this instructor believed that Blacks need special help to pass any course.

The classroom was not the only campus community where these participants experienced acts of discouragement due to their race and the color of their skin. They report instances from all segments of the campus and nearby neighborhoods. Mike O. states that:

This (Wesleyan University) was where I began to feel racism among the students, and the faculty, and the town's (Middletown, CT.) people much more so than I had felt at a place like Exeter which was far more insulated and where I think people's racial attitudes were not nearly as pronounced.

Marion P. stated that:

... I hasten to add that it was ... a racist school. The year I started, the KKK youth chapter was thrown off campus, this was in 1981. They would hold the KKK business meeting and rally on campus every year. Of course, the Klan was all over the state of Texas then.

Steven R., in discussing problems on his campus, tells us that:

there were some instances of racial strife, problems, and people driving by and yelling 'nigger' .... I remember there was an article or statement made by a white group that there were two life styles on campus, there was one that was white, there was one that was Black and if you were Black you hung out in certain circles and if you were white you hung out in certain circles and very few individuals mixed with the other.

Such comments were very common amongst the participants, as we have seen earlier in this chapter.

Not all of the reports were of negative race related experiences, some of the comments recounted terrible acts of physical violence directed at African American students. Fred D. reported that:

... basically on my campus, the first semester I was there, they had what I considered to be race riots --- it was really bad. What was happening, an awful white fraternity was just raising havoc on campus. I considered it to be a racist fraternity with most of the members from the football team. They were actually attacking Black female students late at night and this was right there on Hofstra's campus. They would also attempt to attack Black male students if they caught them alone late at night. Once I was driving with a friend and these fraternity members -- - I guess sometimes it is hard to separate racial problems from acts of stupidity --- and there was like ten guys in a car that tried to run me and my friend off the road. They were shouting derogatory comments and yelling racial slurs. It was pretty bad that first semester.

One of the participants shared his experience with whites that he encountered on the campus as something that they respond to based on a life time of learning to know Blacks in a certain way, particularly in a distorted way based on a creation of the media and movies. Sean P. tells us that:

... always being taller and bigger than the other students and being aggressive --- maybe some of the racism or I've experienced was due to being large, Black, male, and aggressive. In my experience, that is always intimidating to white people. I remember as early as grade school I'd be the first to raise my hand and I'd yell out the answer if the teacher didn't call on me. It intimidated some of my teachers and it did intimidate some of the students, but I suppose if I were large and white, I doubt it would have had the same reaction.

Sean is six seven, two hundred and forty pound athlete that played basketball for Boston University. He explained that this response to his "size and blackness" was something that he grew up with but viewed

it as "racist attitudes about the potential dangers posed by all Black males."

Marion P. tells us when discussing his experience of dormitory life on his campus that:

During my entire stay at LU I was assigned to an all Black dormitory. The school placed Black students together in a dormitory because they decided that should be done and it was best. Black students had no input. It was a racist decision by a racist administration. All Black students were sent to certain dorms, and all Caucasian students were sent to certain dorms and if they had to mix the two groups in some dorms, Blacks were on the third and fourth floors and Caucasians were on the first and second floors. It was a very simple system, it was what I would call institutionalized racism and everybody knew that. I know you find it difficult to believe, but to answer your question once again, no! No one in my dorm (during MP's stay) was of a different color, period! The dorm was 100% Black. And it was the design, intent, and plan of the administration.

John A. gives an account of segregated housing which was voluntary and limited in its capacity to house students. Fourteen of the sixteen participants attended colleges with a house or dormitory assigned to African American students. The system which is most available to all students is a form of self segregation by participating in a lottery system and selecting roommates. John A. explained that at his college:

The house on campus that my friends and I lived in was a college owned building used by the Association of Black Collegians (ABC). We had a house as an organization, a place where we would hold meetings, events, etc. The upstairs portion of that house consisted of residential units, so we had six rooms. We had the upstairs portion of this ABC house in my sophomore and junior years. I moved back into the dorms my senior year.

In closing the discussion of race inequalities, I will share a comment made by Mike O. He tells us that:

I can sum up my experience of racism by saying that ... I don't think I have a single white male friend that I remember from Wesleyan. The people that I remember and maintain contact with from Wesleyan are Blacks. It is not that you experience anything



necessarily overt, its just that you know you were getting to the point where you felt a separateness and apartness from the white students and faculty.

Participants shared their experiences of discouragement and discrimination at the hands of college/university faculty, staff and students; racial insults from the on-campus and off-campus community; mistrust and avoidance; The participants were able adapt to this environment which they perceived to be hostile, and where they were greeted with a barrage of verbal attacks due to their dark skin. In spite of the obstacles they were able to succeed and persist to degree completion.

Many factors contributed to their success including the campus support they received from white students, faculty and administrators. This was very noticeable in areas of leadership. Later in this chapter, we will review the involvement of the study participants in campus activities. They held positions of leadership, successfully negotiated with campus administrators, and found White and African American faculty that devoted time to counseling and assisting them. They reported several positive experiences, directly influencing their persistence, while in college. However, one hundred percent of the study participants credited their early years as being the most significant in providing positive experiences which helped to give them self-confidence, determination and pride in themselves.

### Persistence and positive significant Experiences

#### Introduction

"Black parents continue to send their children into environmental settings where they are treated as aliens and

viewed as not belonging. Too often, our best and brightest students are denied an educational experience that provides the academic and social successes that build positive self images for the best education possible."

The above statement is but one observation from research by Allen, Epps, and Haniff (1991 p 124), reporting on the extent and persistence of various forms of discouragement experienced by African Americans students in our educational institutions. It is not surprising that African Americans would claim such a high number of college drop outs amongst their ranks if they rely on the academy to "build positive self images". It is documented in the literature, including much of the literature cited in this study and from the life stories of the study participants, that the college experience of African Americans attending historically white colleges erodes the self confidence they have when enter college. Since this study does not attempt to speak in any detail to higher education's failures, I will devote attention to identifying the source of strength and support these degree completers credit for their positive self image.

Many factors contribute to students academic success in college. Characteristics that students develop prior to entering college seems to be the primary factor influencing success. These characteristics include, preparation for college, social and economic status, early family involvement in their child's learning, SAT/ACT scores, and GPA scores (Allen, Epps and Haniff, 1991).

The precollege and college experiences supplemented by personal characteristics and support services provided by the university can operate to impact the performance of students. However it is not entirely clear whether or not variables are predictors of Black and White students academic performance. According to White and Suddick

(1981) race difference is not significant in most colleges and universities with selective admissions criteria. African American and White students would be selected for admission with presumably comparable preparation based on SAT/ACT and GPA scores, showing little or no significance in college achievement and persistence to degree completion.

Given these research findings, we must carefully examine other factors which may cause some performance differences at least in terms of classroom behavior as we observed earlier in this chapter, when participants indicated that they felt compelled to withdraw from classroom discussions due to unfair treatment they believed they received from their instructors, and their perception of race based inequality or what they refer to as racism. Since participants in this study, irrespective of high school performance actually fell behind during their first and second year of college, I will look to that experience prior to college for answers. Many of these persisters, as reported earlier, re-establish themselves on their journey to degree completion and graduated with honors. Success was accomplished in spite of what may be seen as insurmountable pressure working against any chance of success.

As a result of previously reported experiences the persisters were compelled to find a way or rediscover how to succeed. In order to succeed they had to rethink the purpose for enduring the discouragement and gain renewed strength by remembering where the journey started. We will turn our attention to the role of family and others; next we will look at academic preparation; followed by the



academic support students found on their campuses; and, finally we will close with a discussion of the role of student initiated involvement and a few concluding comments.

### Finding a way to Succeed

"If you don't know where you are going, remember where you are coming from."

African proverb

The study participants told us of decisions made and strategies employed which were more than angry responses to perceived exclusion. Becoming less involved in the classroom was obviously a conscious decision based on consideration of the consequences of one behavior over another. The discouragement experienced by these participants, starting as first and second semester freshmen, required action on their part to get them out of what they believed to be harm's way. They were able to pull strength and insight gained during early learning from the family, church, community leaders, school teachers, school administrators, and their peers. It was with resolve and internal fortitude that enabled these degree completers to persist while determining the "road" to take that would help them complete their journey. The judgment needed was obviously within, lessons of early years that were easily recalled by remembering past learning. It was with this resourcefulness that these persisters made decisions that obviously worked to their advantage; after all, they are successful degree completers.

## Remembering where the journey Started

As we will see later in this chapter, the positive, lasting and significant experiences started very early in life. Confidence building started with the experience in the home by loving and caring parent(s) and the attendant concern and interest displayed in expressions of love and support for all areas of their child's development. As they progressed through their early years, in elementary and junior high school, there were many positive experiences with their peers, teachers, school administrators, school counselors, and individuals in the community. It was that early experience in learning of their importance that helped to build self confidence that they would draw on when experiencing feelings of not belonging. They turned to what they were taught by their families, something they knew and understood, that something was that they were somebody, they were important, they were intelligent, and they could succeed.

Alonzo shares an experience of discouragement that resulted in one of his friends leaving college due to what he viewed as insufficient strength gained from his family.

My friend went to Brockport with me and dropped out after a year. He was a very bright kid, but his father always wanted him to go to a vocational school. He said that his father always told him that he would succeed if he learned a skill and went to work after high school. He didn't know if his father thought that he could not do college work or that college would not be helpful in getting him a decent job. This very bright guy was really a mess when it came to figuring out what he was about. I don't know if it was his intent to go to college or if he was so bright that his shoal counselor pressured him. I think that he just wanted make his father happy and learn a trade and get a job. The fact that he was from a single parent home hurt him. It was just his father, 4 brothers, and 3 sisters, his mother had died when he was young. It was rough our first year, especially with some of the white faculty and students. But there were many

very helpful White and Black faculty on that campus. They were accessible, but you had to find them. His grades slipped and he was placed in remedial and study skills classes. We tried to convince him to avoid those programs and find an instructor that he could develop a close relationship with. After our first semester he changed in terms of his confidence. You could see that the treatment we received was taking something out of him - he told me that 'maybe this is not for me' and didn't return after the first year.

Alonzo has just shared with us a "survival strategy" that Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found to be frequently employed by members of the Black community. They report that the discriminatory treatment "engender a lack of self-confidence that they can compete with whites in matters considered traditionally as white people's domain, such as...academic tasks." Alonzo was also expressing what he believed to be poor confidence and image building from his friend's father. In addition the college did not appear to have a program designed to tap into the strength, which was academic ability, of the student based on the information reported by Alonzo. The university responded to his decline in performance by placing him in skills building programs, offering further evidence that he was unable to compete at the college level.

Mike O. shares his memory of guidance his parents provided that helped when things were difficult.

I thank my parents for what they instilled in me as a young child; what they offered in preparing me to make good decisions every step of the way. Their preparation pointed me in the direction that I should travel and their guidance instilled in me the values that I needed to stay on the right path.

He continues with the following comment:

I praise God for having them because they were very important in building the confidence in me needed to believe in myself in the sense that they recognized my accomplishments and they built on those. I didn't always do things that made them happy and they corrected me for those, but they were really good about recognizing my achievements, and that included school.



We will hear from John A, a participant that strayed off path and had to find a way to get back on path. He believes that his self-confidence was shattered for a while in college and he began to have some doubt as to his ability to succeed. With the assistance of a white philosophy instructor that took an interest in him, he was able to bring his life back together, remembering those things that he was taught by his family as a young child.

I think, in looking back, that there was some sort of stigma attached to Black students, and I believe that I kinda bought into that stigma. If you are given information saying that you're probably not going to do too well, particularly as a Black engineering student - failure is like a self-fulfilling prophecy if you keep hearing it enough. I know for myself at some point I lost confidence in my ability. As a youth in elementary and high school, I thought I could learn anything, if you would give me five minutes to read it, I will be able to master it. Somewhere along the way, in college, I lost that and in fact the opposite occurred, I started doubting myself. It was tough for me to figure out what caused the shattering of my confidence. I don't know if it was one experience or if it was just the college environment.

The participants believed that the strength they gained during their early years was in part due to their parents strong religious beliefs which included family involvement in religious activities. Mike O. and Richard S., both Catholics, stated that religion was very important to them and has offered guidance whenever they experienced self-doubt and felt that they would "stray from the path." The following comments are the words of Mike O telling us of a very low point in his life while at Wesleyan University.

I reached a very low point and almost lost confidence in myself. I did bad in my studies and I was about to give up on me, it was the lowest level I had ever reached in my life in terms of my level of self-confidence. But from that point on there was no place to go but up, so I prayed. I believe it is very important, I think it comes from having grown up in a family that's religious but not overly religious, a family that had a sense of spirituality, had some kind of sense of how you treat people. They clearly understood the road that I should take to get to my

destination and, I believe, they gave me the values to succeed, to see the journey to its conclusion.

Richard S., sharing his experience of self-doubt, tells us that:

My feeling of not belonging was so intense that it almost caused me to leave college. I was beginning to question whether or not college was what I should be doing. I remember that during my freshman year my instructors made me feel really dumb and I started to feel dumb and inferior. It was at this point that I prayed, remembering what my parents, the nuns and priest had always encouraged. My parents and the church always taught us that, "if you are doing the right thing you will know, because it is God's work and no one will be able to alter that journey." It was with that searching that I was able regain my self-confidence and became determined that no one would cause me to stray from the path that I had selected for myself.

It is sort of funny, but I had uncle's and aunt's that had graduated from Black and white colleges. They were mostly Protestants (Richard laughs and says mostly religious doubters) and would always tell us that whites are not necessarily out help you. They also taught us a lot about slavery and conditions following slavery, demonstrating how they (whites) went to great lengths to oppress Blacks. My one uncle would always say that religion was also important to oppress Blacks, so watch out for the nuns and priest. This, of course, would upset my mother but I now realize that my uncles and aunts may have had, at least half of the message that helped to right my journey.

Richard's words were revealing in that they told us of parental and other significant family members efforts to build self confidence while at the same time develop an awareness of self. According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), a strong "black" self-identity or what they refer to as "fictive kinship", is vital to succeeding.

As indicated in chapter 2, the literature, until recently, formulated findings and conclusions based on the false assumption that self identity of all groups develop in a similar fashion. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991 p. 24),

current research and theory on college student change and development appear quite clearly to assume that the nature and processes of identity development among Blacks and other nonwhite students are essentially the same as those for whites.

However, more recently, emerging literature concerning specific characteristics of African American identity development suggests differences which should be of interest to all of those that consider the success of African American males as important to the future of higher learning. The model, advanced by Cross (1971 pp. 100-107), of Black identity formation (discussed in chapter two) not only informs our understanding of the importance of identity in persistence to degree completion, but to point out the unique characteristics of the development for participants included in this study.

Additional comments from study participants also suggests uniquely different characteristics in the development of identity for African Americans. One such comment is from John J., when he tells us that:

we were taught to respect people in positions of authority but not to believe that white people were interested in our success, at least not as they expected it for white males. You understand, our parents and relatives taught us to appear interested but block-out the words. Black people have seen too much suffering and struggling by placing a great deal of confidence in the advice of whites.

Mike O. shares a similar view to John J, telling us that:

It is also important for you to always have confidence in yourself, confidence in your ability. Black parents should teach their children, starting at a very young age, to never let white people rob their child of his self-confidence.

As we have learned from the participants, it is a mistake to be overly reliant on the university to do the right thing for all members of the campus community. Study participants entering college were confronted with many experiences of discouragement that caused them to begin questioning their confidence to compete. Colleges and universities do not have structures in place to ensure an "educational experience that provides the academic and social successes that build



positive self images for the best education possible". This was the certainly the case for these African American male study participants.

Many lessons were learned in the family during the participants' early formative years. They learned of their value, their importance, and the need to succeed. They believed that family, friends, and their peers counted on them to succeed, to complete the college program; it was in the family that the journey started. I believe we will gain a greater appreciation of how the idea of college and the role played by family members and others in developing and sustaining strengths their children would need must be understood before we can clearly gain a perspective as to how they would overcome the negative acts of others intended to discourage. It was equally important that they pull from past experience and learning to overcome their own actions, particularly the act of withdrawing from participation in the classroom, an act which this researcher considered to be potentially self destructive.

### The role of family and significant others in Persistence

#### The idea of College

As I reviewed the words of these persisters and considered their meaning, the meaning of their individual and collective journeys, I was taken back to my own experience of degree completion. I felt that they were echoing the experience of the "road" leading them to college degree completion as but one exit from life's super highway which is replete with detours, distractions and at times, unmarked trails for the adventurous traveler. As I listened to their words, I heard them

speak of problems they encountered on the "road" leading to degree completion. The road posed numerous decision points for the travelers not yet certain as to the purpose of the journey and/or the destination. This was described most eloquently by John A., one of the participants introduced in the previous chapter. Even with the best of preparation, guidance and mentoring, degree completion was not an easy journey for the study participants. However, it was clear that the sooner one starts preparing for college entry the greater the chances are of experiencing a certain amount of success. Miguel states that:

"In retrospect I saw how we should have been more prepared for college, especially in high school. I felt that we could have accomplished as well as all those other students if we were only prepared. Many of the guys that graduated from high school with me did not make it - they did not succeed for many reasons, including racist attitudes on campus, finances, the lack of support, and the lack of preparation for college. If it had not been for the fact that I hate to be called a loser, I could read a little, I didn't want to disappoint my parents, and I was determined to graduate from college, I could have been a statistic also - not graduating from college."

Richard S. said that:

"I don't believe that you could start your preparation for college when during your junior or senior year in high school. I think you start before you enter kindergarten and in my case, early in my elementary school experience as possible - I believe I was in the second or third grade when I realized that college was expected of me---it was to be a continuation of my education."

Twenty-two of the twenty-five study participants stated that they always knew that they would attend college. The idea of college was embraced by them at a very young age. These participants were very certain that the idea of attending college was first introduced to them by a parent, however they could not provide concrete examples of how they first realized that college was expected of them. It was simply an idea that they credit to their parents.

I agree with Richard S. when he states that the process of preparing for college must start as early in the educational experience as possible if the persister is to be successful at the college level. It would appear to me that it is wrong to assume that interest in college begins when the student is eighteen or enter college. In order to be successful in the academic community, you must begin early, as early as pre-natal training (Elam, 1986 p. 41). Given the wide range of educational experiences of the study participants' parents, I was curious as to how the study participants were socialized into, not only valuing education, but motivated at such young ages to achieve in the classroom. I will show, through the words of the participants, that the technique for starting the process of motivating was similar in the sense parents conveyed an expectation of achievement and respect for education. The process included visible concern displayed through school visits, setting aside study time and an outpouring of an abundance of praise for the ability and accomplishments of their children. The literature cited in chapter two supports my belief that Preparation for college is a progressive socialization process, leading young children to initially desire learning and devote time to developing the skills needed to be successful in the classroom.

According to Katz (1967), Jackson (1986), Elam (1989), and Ogbu (1991), family background is extremely important in establishing initial interest in education and eventual success in persisting to college degree completion. Jackson (1986 p. 38) indicate that factors most often associated with success in education include educational attainment of parents, stability of the household, family income, size



of family, and early intervention in the child's life. He adds that if proper pre-natal health care is indeed not too early to start thinking and preparing the future educational path for the journey leading to college degree completion. In light of this literature I was led to wonder how is it possible for African Americans to rise above poverty, family strife, poorly educated parent(s), large families living in crowded and cramped conditions; often, multiple families in these neighborhoods share similar experiences.

Eight of the eleven study participants in this chapter and two introduced in the previous chapter were first generation college graduates and described themselves as members of poor families, but they all indicated that they did not realize that they were poor. They all shared the common experience of having caring and loving parents that introduced them to the value of an education. Richard S., one of the study participants said:

although my father did not graduate from high school, my mother completed high school, and we were on welfare a great deal of my childhood, we - my seven sisters and brothers - never realized that we were poor or disadvantaged. They were loving parents that encouraged us to work hard in school in order to get decent jobs. My father was a tool maker and worked for several factories during the period when tool companies were downsizing and lay-offs were quite common. He and a friend of his, another Black tool maker that usually worked for the same companies as he did, were usually laid off first irrespective of job performance or seniority, although they usually had limited seniority due to frequent lay-offs. The lack of work and periodic dependency on welfare forced my parents to live in separate locations due to welfare rules concerning adult males in the household. My parents made a special effort to shield their pain, their suffering and conditions they had to endure from their children.

We noticed in the profiles that John A. and Marion P. were exposed to family (siblings and parents) members that not only served

as role models, but loving nurturing individuals. These two participants talked about a process of encouraging learning. Perhaps love and warmth is the single commodity that parents at any economic and educational level can supply in abundance. It was this desire to support and encourage their children that Richard's parents was able to provide during their formative years. It is a relentlessness in the development of their children that parents must acquire if they are to be successful in directing their child to the road leading to a purposeful educational outcome; four-year college degree completion.

Most participants in this study reported that they were "always" aware of the importance of a college education and that they would attend college. It was an idea they associated with their immediate family and supported by others. As we will see the participants recalled much more detail when describing their experience with individuals, other than their parent(s), encouraging their interest in education. Although they credit the idea of college as something they always knew was expected of them by their parent(s), examples of specific early experiences with parent(s) were vague and unclear. Perhaps the lack of early experiences could not be recalled because the socializing process was always a part of the home, an environment that they were born into, which would lead me to believe that it was simply due to the age at the time the parental indoctrination began. Study participants recalled specific examples of elementary and high school support, interactions with teachers and administrators, hours parents set aside for study, and interactions with classmates with very little difficulty.

Twenty-two, or eighty-eight percent of the subjects interviewed stated that the idea of college had always been a part of their earliest memory--they had always realized that they would attend college. Most of them were unable to clearly recall when and how that idea was first introduced to them. That is very noticeable in the following statement by Fred D. when he attempts to determine when he first realized that he would attend college.

I would say that I was definitely expected to go to college but if I chose not to, that was ok too. But it was known that I definitely was going, there was no doubt about it, I guess in everyone's mind, especially in my mind and I think, looking back, my decision to go to college was probably due to the push that my parents made. They made sure that I was doing good in school, checking up on me --- they were always behind me every step of the way. But it didn't matter, I knew that if I didn't go to college they might have been unhappy but I probably wouldn't have lost their support. Basically it was like, well whatever you want to do as a man, we're happy, go ahead and do it, we'll be behind you even though we may have wished you had done other things.

Fred D. offers a justification for going to college which was repeated by most of the participants when he said that his parents 'might have been unhappy' if he didn't go to college. Tinto (1993, p144) advances the notion that the desire to satisfy parents is an important factor in persistence. Other participants expressed that same view in a much more direct manner but with an equal absence of clarity as to when the idea was first introduced to them and the form of that message.

Sean P. mentions his family as being instrumental in creating an expectation of degree completion. He describes the idea in a manner similar to that of Marion P., the participant you were introduced to in chapter four. As you may recall, Marion P. stated that:

Again, my decision to go to college was very simple; you were told you were going to high school and you were going to college



by your parents, there were no ifs, ands, and buts here. This (college) was the next progression in life, and probably you realized that you could make a choice, (if) you didn't know better, and we were definitely not bad enough to question them (our parents). You understand that it was a part of growing up, you go to high school, you go to college and you get a job which is just how life works.

When we compare Sean P.'s statement with Marion P.'s, we see a great deal of similarity in how they internalized their parents' view of college attendance for their children. In terms not as forceful and certain as Marion P., Sean P. made the following statement which he attributes to the influence of his family:

... there was a certain expectation from my parents and other people that they associated with; my friends' parents always asked "what school are you going to?" Not, are you going to school? You know, there was always an expectation that you would go to junior high school, you would go to high school, and you would go to college, then, and after that you decided what to do. But those things were mandatory, the only question was "what college are you going to?"

How these persisters discovered that college completion was expected of them at such an early age is less important than the fact that the desire to succeed in school was there. However, as mentioned earlier, the college students' precollege attitude is considered to be a strong influence on a student's motivation to persist. The fact that these students expected to succeed in school at all levels seems to be fairly consistent with all participants. One participant expressed his uncertainty as to how he first knew that college was expected of him in words that may be representative of what many of the participants felt and attempted to share.

It was Steven R. that offered the following explanation to the researcher's inquiry as to when did he come to know and understand that he would go to college. He responded by stating that:

Junior high school, I think was about the first time I ever gave serious thought to college and going to college, and a need for college. For some reason or another I always knew, though, that I would go to college. I didn't know how it was going to be paid, I didn't give much thought to that but I knew that my destiny, as far as school was concerned, was going to be college somewhere, somehow. I don't know when and how it was placed in my head, it was something --- it was a feeling that I had; I always knew that I would earn a college degree. It was just a feeling that was there. I can't explain how it came, it was something that occurred at a particular point, it is just that I knew that I would go to college and graduate. That's it! I don't think I thought about it until junior high school, not until junior high did I really become conscious of that fact. But I do know that it was not something that just sprung into my head at that time; it was just something that came to the front of my mind at that time, although it was a feeling that I believe I always had. I don't remember consciously thinking of it until junior high school. (Steven R. laughed) I guess my mother played a real mind game on me.

Parental involvement in the overall preparation of the persister for college does not stop with "planting" the idea of college. It is only a part of a nurturing process which will continue as long as it takes for the persister to internalize the value of education. It is clear from the narratives of the study participants, as we will see later, that their parents were not only loving but supportive in encouraging them to succeed in school. Obviously, parents are usually inclined to value and encourage their children to succeed in school. As discussed in chapter two, the literature is replete with examples of unsuccessful African American male college students. In order for children to succeed in school, they need more than parental demands for high academic achievement. Parents must teach their children the requisite behavior for achieving their educational goals (Ogbu, pg. 211).

One of the participants captured, for me, the significance of early intervention in teaching the behavior and skills required for

educational goal attainment. This is observed in the following statement from Steven R.:

I found that those who didn't complete (college), didn't complete because of those things that we know that cause people to drop out of were homesick, some of them could not deal with so many negative attitudes of white people and that was understandable but ... just looking at those individuals who didn't make it, I think more than anything it was our own backgrounds as far as study skills, what we brought with us - what skills we brought with us such as reading, writing, arithmetic and just a general knowledge of the world and what was going on around us. I think a lot of us were naive to that aspect of the world - where we knew the "hood" (neighborhood), and street life and all of that, we knew very little about the world and its impact on us. It was not even as encompassing as the world, it was also the city, the state, legislation and how bills are passed, and how Congress worked. I found that there was a different emphasis when looking at my white counterparts as compared to the emphasis my Black counterparts placed on things. Many of us came from one parent homes where we were the only ones who ever went to college and there was no one to show you the way, to tell you what to expect, and how to get over the hump. Where as my white counterparts had the father, the uncle, the mother you know, someone who went to college. There were just so many things there to assist them. There was a lot that we had to catch up on to get to that point ... At least my mother always believed that education was important but she didn't know exactly what I would need to do. I guess she did her job, she motivated me and I was able to find out how to do the rest. They (African Americans) must understand why that degree is important and why they need to have it.

Steven R's support was in the form of motivation which encouraged him to develop the interest in college and ultimately the determination to pursue a college degree. It is obviously important that interest in education must begin at an early age. Without an early interest many young people run the risk of completing their elementary and secondary education without adequate reading and math skills to receive consideration for college entrance. This point was adequately made by Steven R.

The majority of the participants in this study shared similar experiences that they referred to as motivational experiences.



Richard S. described his motivation as directly attributable to his parents as the following comments indicate:

My parents never went to college --- well, I take that back, my mother went to a community college and received her AAS degree in nursing about five years after I completed my BA degree. My father did not complete high school, but they both encouraged the children to study hard. They served as excellent motivators in terms of praising what education could provide. I had uncles and aunts that would help my parents involve us in structured learning experiences and encourage us to study hard.

One of the participants expressed the motivational support he received from his mother in very brief but clearly consistent with other study participants from female headed households. Norman B. made the following statement:

I grew up in a single family household with my mother, of course, leading the way for her ten children. She always, being the dominate figure that she was, encouraged all of us to continue our education as much as possible and to the extent that we were able. We always believed that, yes, we could go to college even though we weren't from a family where the academic tradition of excellence was in our background. We always felt, being encouraged by our mother, that we could achieve academically.

As mentioned and documented, interest in education must begin as early as possible if a child is to embark on the 'road' leading to success. Success in this instance is college degree completion and the road to travel will be charted and mapped as the persister accepts the goals and intentions of his parents and others as his. This process requires patience, hard work, and skill in order to move the idea of college from a parents dream to reality. Parents must often rely on the assistance of others to transform their dream of a college degree for their child(ren) into the potential persister's 'certainty of intentions. The reliance upon others takes on increased importance

when parents are without formal education and familiarity with the neighborhood resources and/or individuals available to assist their children .

#### Family members as role models in perpetuating the idea of College

Throughout the persisters' educational experience, as we will see, others will play a significant role in offering information, guidance, and in general support to keep the persister on the road to success. Initially we witness this involvement from relatives, family and neighborhood friends, but the circle of support will widen as we will see, once the individual enters school. Usually teachers, school administrators and classmates will serve to motivate, encourage and challenge these study participants. At an early age many of the participants cited instances where they were given direction which was later interpreted as encouragement and motivation to succeed in school. Just as John J's uncle was extremely involved as a mentor and counselor throughout his pre-kindergarten years and continuing throughout high school, other participants reported experiences of family members' support in a similar fashion. Lacy J. states that:

my grandmother used to keep my brother and I during the summers, she used to take us to the Vermont library in my hometown every week. This experience, I believe, influenced my interest in books and the importance of setting aside time to read.

It was also stated by some of the participants that they were influenced to think in terms of college simply because they were surrounded by close family members that modeled what was expected in terms of valuing and pursuing education. Tony W. states that:

I was always surrounded by college graduates on my mother's side of the family: my mother is a graduate of the Columbia University's School of Nursing; I have an aunt who graduated,

under grad, from Cornell University and Columbia's graduate school; and, two other aunts that graduated from the City College of New York. So on that side of the family, I would say there were some positive role models, at least for going to college and obtaining a degree. I would say that their influence on me was due entirely to the fact that they had degrees. I don't think I ever felt pressured in that they would say, "you have to get a degree or you have to go to college." It was just a matter that they had degrees and, you know, there it was just not an alien type of thing for me. Being a Black male and having family, in fact, actually graduate from college was different than the experience of most of my friends.

Richard S. tells of a similar experience with relatives, particularly two of his uncles and several aunts, that offered a tremendous amount of guidance for him and his brothers and sisters. He states that:

My parents really believed in education and appeared to admire the family members with degrees. Two of my uncles, my mother's brothers, have college degrees and are very close to my mother. My mother relied on them heavily to assist her, especially after my father left us. One of my uncles would visit us practically every day and spend time with me and my seven brothers and sisters. He visited almost daily when my dad was with us but made a special effort to spend more time after my dad left. Several of my aunts had college degrees and would make a point of doing things with us almost weekly. Going to school and enjoying it was something that I always associated with my uncles and aunts. Since they were so close to us I always assumed that we were supposed to accomplish what they accomplished. They never said that we should study hard and prepare to go to college. It was as though they all focused on the importance of what we were doing at the particular time they engaged us. I remember my uncle always praising my drawings, exams, homework, and anything that I was doing in school or church. He always wanted me to show him how I did something or where I found an answer to a test question. We spent a lot of time in the library, walking on the campuses of the two local colleges, and going to bookstores. He was really encouraging me to prepare for college without stating it.

It was apparent from some of the study participants that family members as role models offered special meaning to the notion of succeeding academically. In a few instances the support and role models for children of parents without college or professional degrees



was found in the association with family members. Many of the study participants were fortunate to have close family members to lend a helping hand, particularly those that served as role models. In single female headed households, as seen in the previous chapter in the case of John A. and the comments made earlier by Richard S., college educated male family members made an important contribution. These two participants enjoyed the benefit of uncles that not only served as role models that they could identify with, but also loving, caring and nurturing members of their family. They had a closeness to these individuals that gave meaning to the message of their mothers' message to them to get an education. Many African American males are not as fortunate, they do not have the college educated male role model that happens to be an uncle or another close relative.

#### Significant others as role models in perpetuating the idea of College

Many parents encourage their children to continue their education, at least through college and beyond, but more often than not, children from many poor urban families are told that they should 'get a good education, so that you avoid ending up like me' without role models in the family or community to assist in offering alternatives (Ogbu, 1991, p. 211).

Given the current crisis African American males are facing with high unemployment, escalating numbers incarcerated, and a significant number born into poor female headed households, it isn't debatable that parents must stress the value of an education to their children at a very early age in an attempt to turn an escalating problem

around. This message, according to Jackson (1986, p. 42), must be "forcefully and consistently drummed" into the thinking of these children with special emphasis placed on young African American males. As cited in chapter two, parents of these children teach them to strive for high educational goals and clearly state the immediate and future consequences of failure. These parents are usually clear about the behavior they expect while their children are in school, and will usually mete out extreme punishment for failure to comply. What is lacking in this process are the requisite instructions their children need in order to achieve the desired educational goals these parents believe to be necessary.

Many of the study participants received the encouragement from parents but did not have the benefit of close family members to serve as role models as seen with Richard S. and John J. In those cases participants received the urging to value education without parents fully informed as to the proper way to prepare their child(ren). It is also important to note that the idea of valuing education which, I suppose was celebrated by degree completion, was introduced in a number of ways. With Richard S. and John J. we observed that the idea was gradual and unintrusive, but never the less relentlessly consistent. It was a very subtle form of indoctrination when compared with Nick M., a participant you were introduced to in the previous chapter, when he said that his father would say very often that:

if I didn't go to college that I'd be a mule the rest of my life. And so being naturally disinclined to do physical labor, I went with that idea ... I come from a family where, like a lot of families, the whole objective (of higher education) is to get a good job ....

Other study participants received similar forms of encouragement, without the benefit of close family members to serve as role models. As you recall from chapter 4, Nick's mother wanted him to go to a two year college and get a job at the post office but his father "vetoed" that decision. Neither his father nor his mother had any idea of how to prepare him or stimulate his interest in learning. He was motivated by not wanting a career as a laborer, the type of work that he associated his father with. As cited in chapter two, many African American males see little value to encouragement to get an education in order to improve their status when they see so few people in their neighborhood benefiting from education or for that matter, educated. The successful individual, by neighborhood standards, may be the person earning a living from criminal activities. Given the odds against succeeding, we must turn to some of our study participants in order to determine how they managed to escape the neighborhood with a determination to attend college.

In the case of Nick M., we noticed that several people took an active interest in his education from a very early age. The person he credits with the major influence when he was very young was a neighborhood person. He said that:

My decision to go to college was influenced by several people including one of the more outstanding individuals I have ever met. My daily routine started with a neighborhood women that encouraged education through her every action. Deacon Williams' wife was my godmother. She was big on education, she was self-educated, she had a lot of kids, she read poetry at the table in the morning. Before we'd go to school I'd go down there and her son, we'd go to school together, she would recite poetry without looking at the book. She was a great inspiration to me as far as really just encouraging you to be an educated person and that was a big factor.



Norman B. was influenced to pursue a collage degree as a result of observing his father's work. He states that:

I was the 7th of 10 kids - my father passed away when I was about 9 years old. We grew up in a single parent household with my mother, of course, leading the way ... My father was a construction worker and I can remember going to visit him when buildings were being torn down --- his responsibility was to break bricks, to shape and preserve as many as possible after the buildings had been torn down. It was always cold. I can remember seeing him and other African American males, who were working on the project, standing around a little camp fire trying to keep warm on those cold cold days. And, that was a sense of encouragement for me, knowing that - I didn't want to end up in a situation where I had to work outside or to work on a job that was very demanding physically, like my father did; I work in a Coca Cola plant like some of my parents' friends.

Norman B., as with Nick M., was fairly certain that he wanted an education which would give him access to employment opportunities other than strenuous labor that his father and his father's friends had to do. Since Norman did not have any family members to turn to in his effort to understand more about college programs and in general, how to proceed, he turned to one of the local agencies that he was familiar with for consultation. Norman, as we will see, received a great deal of guidance and support from the director of the community center that he attended for after school programs. Norman tells us:

I wanted to go to college, and I wanted to get away. So I went to a local agency, the Ader Asper McKinley Community Center in Chicago. I talked to Mr. McKinley, in regards to pursuing a college education. We discussed what it would take in terms of preparation and he agreed to help me if I was ready after finishing my junior year in high school. He made it clear to me what different colleges would expect and what he would expect in terms of my school performance. I was to meet with him periodically for something similar to progress reports. He came up with the idea of my attending Lewis University. I had wanted, initially, the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire and my second choice was Southern Illinois University. I had gotten accepted at Southern Illinois but again, it was a financial aid issue which prevented me from going there. So, Mr. McKinley had

suggested Lewis University for a number of reasons. He realized that there were not a lot of minority students on the campus of Lewis University at that particular time. He felt that, aahh, if he had his way he would try to encourage as many minority students to enroll there as possible, so this was his way to try to increase the minority student enrollment. His agency was very much involved in getting minorities in the city of Chicago into college. He helped to get minority students into various colleges, not just colleges within the city of Chicago, but historically Black colleges, community colleges, four year universities, that was his responsibility. He was actively involved in that. So I really respect the man for all he has done for me.

Norman placed a tremendous amount of trust in this man whom neither he nor his mother knew anything about. The past relationship had been one with recreational and social development program staff. It was Norman's trust in the organization and confidence in Mr. McKinley that allowed a trusting relationship to exist. A relationship which one would assume parents or close relatives, as witnessed with John J's uncle, would be responsible for deciding. The absence of any family members with knowledge of how one should prepare for college or the steps required for college selection, application, and admission, Norman and his mother relied on Mr. McKinley to fulfill the role of significant other.

Often members of the community take on increased responsibility for perpetuating the idea of college by serving as motivators, role models, mentors during the elementary and secondary levels, providing structured after school activities, and assisting in the college selection process. With Norman B. and Nick M. we did not notice extensive involvement in the three areas mentioned above. With Nick, "Deacon Williams' wife" served more as a motivating force who not only helped to develop and encourage learning, but she also helped to

introduce him to certain aspects of preparation for college. Norman was provided guidance in helping him to understand how the process would be mapped in order for him to successfully travel the road leading to degree completion. Perhaps the support Norman received is best classified as a mentoring, after school activities and college selection process. It would appear as though the role of the significant other must become as extensive and involved as needed to accomplish the task of assisting the potential degree completer move forward. It was not made clear to what extent Norman and Nick viewed these individuals as role models. I certainly believe that both saw them as role models but that responsibility was not as significant as the more tangible and direct benefit they received.

I will end this section by introducing a portion of Alonzo C's transcript which focuses on the comprehensiveness of the role of the significant other.

Education in my home was always stressed by my mother and father; it was always stressed as an important end in itself but at the same time, it was a means to an end - end meaning economically. One of the critical things that happened to me in my youth, was that I was very sick as a youngster, I was very asthmatic, I suffered from bronchial asthma. As a result I couldn't participate in a lot of the physical things like other kids my age. There was a period when I was in the hospital for a long time; I was in and out of hospitals for nearly two years. During that time I developed, I just read comic books and moved on to other books that my mother would bring to the hospital. I developed a tendency to read alot and I enjoyed it. At a very early age, six or seven years, I developed this pleasure in reading and I don't think that was the normal thing for most of the children in my neighborhood would. I mean, they would prefer to go outside in the street and play ball or something like that. So that was what carried over when I was in school. So I had no problem in sitting down and reading a book as oppose to watching television.

There were about 5 or 6 neighborhood kids that I spent all of my free time with from age six or seven through college. We did everything together, sports reading socializing, we were a



team. We leaned on each other and pushed each other, displaying a certain competitiveness in everything, whether it was sports or academics. We were all active in the Boy Club; the Boy Club was basically the place where we learned about life. The assistant director of the Club that we attended was very much involved in the social and academic development of all of the boys. He took an interest in my little group and planned special things with us. We were doing things evenings after the boys club closed. After we completed all of our work that the club would pay us for, we just talked hours on end, about everything, about junior high and high school and college. We talked about girls, about politics about what was going on in the city and the neighborhood and sometimes we would finish our work about 8:30 and we would sit and talk till 9:30. This man became our true friend and inspired all of us from age 7 or 8 until this very day. We didn't realize it at the time, but when we first met him he was a junior in high school. He completed high school and college while serving as our friend, counselor, teacher and someone that we all looked up to as a role model. I learned alot about life from listening to him and viewed him as a role model, and he continues to be a role model for me to this very day. He is now the executive director of all of the boys clubs in the western New York area. Let me just say, to see an African American man in his position and that young was important to me. I always went to him. He was basically like an older brother to me. He was responsible for each and everyone of my little group going to college. He gave us jobs during the summer and checked on our progress in school from junior high until I finished my graduate studies. As I told you, he was a high school junior, around 16 or 17 years old, when I met him, so our age difference is only about eight or nine years. At times it is embarrassing because I view him as an older brother and he still treats me like his mischievous nephew. He also maintained his youthfulness and I have aged beyond my years, so people tend to see our roles in reverse (Alonzo laughed).

Many people touched the lives of these degree completers at a very important period in their educational development. We will see how some of those influences and contacts helped to continue the developmental process started by the parents; and how, in certain instances, the influences made it possible for the participants to return to the "road" leading to degree completion. As we will see the individuals, to whom I will introduce you to later, in this study were

important in motivating and encouraging the survey participants.

Before moving too far from the role of the family in persistence, I will also make some brief comments concerning parental involvement in the early academic and social adjustment of their child(ren).

### Making the Grade: Preparing for College

#### Introduction

Everytime you meet a situation, though you think at the time it is an impossibility and you go through the torture of the damned, once you have met and lived through it, you find that forever after you are freer than you were before.

Eleanor Roosevelt

What can we determine from the college experience of the participants to help inform our understanding of the internal and environmental attributes which made it possible for them to persist to degree completion? From the preceding section we learned that the family and others were important to the "idea of College". The process of preparing one to come to know and understand an event which will take place in the future, the distant future for these five, six, and seven year olders, is not an easy task for a family. Since this is true for families with adequate resources and two or more generations of family members with degrees, it must be especially difficult for first, as most of the persisters reported, and second generation degree completers (see table). As previously stated, ten of the sixteen study participants were first generation college graduates and described themselves as members of poor families.

It is not a secret that African Americans, particularly males, are faced with many experiences that devalue their contributions and

attempts to contribute. We observed the devaluing of Edwin's success when he exceeded his engineering class average, and again with Richard and Mike when they attempted to participate in the classroom discussion. These persisters reported that they believed the devaluing of any contribution made or attempted by them was due entirely to their dark skin. By the time they entered college they were prepared to deal with attempts to cause self-doubt, diminish self-esteem, and weaken their self-confidence. Members of the study sample were able to find ways to right themselves and find the road leading to their destination after facing temporary set backs. Their self-identity, self-esteem and confidence was supported from a very broad base which was grounded in a range of relationships with family and friends, providing them with a sense of interpreting reasons for failure and recovering from externally imposed attempts to damage their self-esteem (Graham 1986).

They were indeed able to place the multitude of campus challenges and barriers into perspective and maintain progress in their journey to becoming successful, that is successful degree completers. It was self efficacy, which is traced to a nurturing and caring family and community, that made it possible for them to overcome the problems which confronted them as a result of attending institutions in which the student body was predominantly white.

In order to gain a greater awareness of the factors that went into preparing these participants for college success, we must now turn to their words in order to understand family involvement in building a positive self image; and then we can return to their campuses and hear from them concerning the university/college and



other resources, conditions and programs African American males self report as significant positive factors influencing their persistence to degree completion.

Foundation for college Success: The involvement of family and others in building a positive self-image and Confidence

If a desired educational outcome is to be achieved by the parent(s), the socialization process of their child must extend beyond the mere idea of the persister's classroom learning. From chapter two we realize that parents must become involved in the child's progress and adjustment to the school's learning, growth and development environment. These children, particularly African American males, must develop a seriousness and perseverance in their schoolwork. Without a certain amount of vigilance the child may learn the more appealing manipulative skills instead of those skills needed to enable them to become serious and successful students (J. Ogbu, 1978, p 211). We observed this manipulative quality in Nick M., particularly during his junior and senior high school years. Nick tells us of a talent which he calls "personal intelligence", when he states that:

In those days I relied a lot on what I call personal intelligence. I knew I had a charismatic kind of personality, I knew how to bullshit people and so with that I could do practically anything I wanted to. You would see me out in the hall when I was supposed to be in class and the principal didn't even say anything. So I just had a good time, of course, I only did about average you know because that's what I was putting down, enough to get by, even though I would stand out in certain classes such as social studies, history and those things that had to do with critical thinking around our social history. There was a couple of things that were significant in all of that; one is how my flight away from work ended up leading me to my life's work. I opted to take a journalism course in the twelfth grade because I was trying to get out of a more

difficult English, also in making the choice of going to the Commercial High School, I had to pass typing two years in order to get out of high school. So those two things together added into the foundation for me to become a journalist and it was an accident. I would often get over by plagiarizing songs. I remember once I had palmed off some Motown song lyrics as original poetry and these white ladies, you know, they were just stumbling around you know. These clever poetic lines were really songs by Marvin Gaye or the Temptations, and it was that kind of a joke.

Nick's father encouraged him to read but beyond that his parents did not take an active role in what was going on with him in the classroom. His father was the person that encouraged the idea of college and his Godmother offered some direction and motivation but, beyond that, he was forced to rely on the support of concerned school officials and teachers. It is important to mention that this outside support came early in his educational experience. He mentions his first grade teacher and principal as showing an interest in him. He tells us that:

My elementary school principal, a white Irishman, was interested in sharing books with us. I remember him taking an interest in our learning in the first grade and by the third grade he was loaning me books. In school we had some, I would say real authentic teachers. I remember this old white woman, my first grade teacher took a lot of interest in me. I remember her encouraging me to know things and that was good.

Nick, in a very positive way, was receiving a nurturing support from grade school personnel that extended the process of valuing education. He, in many respects differed from the other participants at this early stage of his educational experience. The teachers and principal of his school recognized his ability and encouraged his learning by stimulating growth in reading and feeling source of support from white teachers and administrators. He was being assisted with learning the behavior required to achieve the educational goals

that his parents had set for him. This process is one which will significantly aid in building a positive self-concept.

Most of these study participants described the process, usually involving a parent, as one that made them feel "confident" that they could accomplish whatever they set as a goal. Again, I would describe this as "certainty of intentions." Nick was fortunate to have school personnel as early as first grade that helped with the building of a positive self-concept. However, it should be noted that Nick developed manipulative skills. This was a distraction from the seriousness needed to achieve. You have observed how that lack of seriousness resulted in grades that prevented him from being accepted at one of the Ivy League schools.

The role is best fulfilled by parents, thus, allowing for consistency over a long period of time and coordination between the child's after-school and in-school activities.

In certain instances the parents are able to maintain contact with the teachers in settings outside of the school. This was reported by Richard S., who said that:

I don't ever recall my mother going to my school for any meeting with my teachers or a progress report. But both of my parents were active in church, they attended Mass every Sunday morning, a parenting group every Wednesday night and my mother went to Bingo every Monday night. (Richard laughed) I guess you have figured out that I am Catholic. My parents would get a full report on all of our progress during the week. They would see the Nuns and the Priest and receive a detailed account of what I was doing in school. The Priest would also visit our house at least twice a month and one of the (Nuns) teachers would stop by at least once a month. A great deal of this was to see if my mother needed in help with food, rent or other things like that since they knew that we were frequently on and off of public assistance.

Richard's situation was unique, due to the involvement of his parents in religion they were able to receive information in a setting



and manner that was, possibly more relaxed and less intimidating and overwhelming. They were also able to get more details in a way that they could understand and take appropriate action. Parent-teacher conferences can be an intimidating experience for parents unaware of what is really being communicated. Teachers are often limited in time available to discuss a particular child due to the limited time available to them, and more often than not teachers assume that parents are familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of their child(ren) (Jackson, 1986, p. 48).

Ogbu (1991) tells us that parents should be involved in their child's early education, taking an active role in their child's school activities. The school's PTA meetings and parent-teacher conferences are important to demonstrate an interest in the development of children. Children value this involvement and will make a special effort to perform well if their parents are interested in their success. Elam (1983 p. 13) and Weis and Fine (1993 p. 214) found that it is important that parents not find out that their children are failing or doing poorly after they have started to fail. The importance of this early involvement was seen in the previous chapter when John A. stated that:

The school that I went to held parents' nights; you know, my parents would come in after working all day and make sure that they were there talking to my teachers. My teachers would tell them the good and tell them the areas where I needed to improve. My parents would always make a point to talk to me about it. It was as though parents had this bond that allowed them to share with each other. During the day, if there was a special PTA type event, like a science fair, they would find a way to get there, at least one of them would be there. That always made me feel good and when I knew they were coming I would work just that much harder to make sure I looked good. You know (JA laughs), if I was doing my science project, I wanted my project to be the best science project so that my teacher would go and

tell my parents how good it was. So they were very active with my education at that early age.

Parental involvement was observed in many different ways including activities encouraged at home to support the in school activities. Usually we notice such activities as time set aside for homework. Two of the presisters you were introduced to in chapter 4 described how important the after school study period was to their parents. That was shared in the stories of Marion P. and John A. It is of importance to note that many of these patterns become useful in high school and college when self discipline is needed simply due to the absence of a parent or parent figure being present to observe and insist on the continued positive behavior designed to keep the persister focused and on the road to degree completion. In the following statement from Steven R., we note that these skills may become internalized and applied by the student while in junior or senior high school:

My mother attended all of my parent-teacher conferences --- my school was right across the street from where we lived, so she always attended those conferences. I was expected to come home and do my homework. My mother was responsible for any kind of school work that I had and caring for me once I came home from school. She passed away when I was 14 years old, I was in junior high school. However, by that time the things that she worked with me on had been basically established as far as my study habits.

Not only is it important for parents to attend school activities and meetings, they must become involved in the programmatic and policy decisions affecting their child(ren). Decisions made by the school may have an extremely negative effect on a child's positive self-concept. The literature is settled on the notion that positive academic self-concept is important to the student's ability to meet academic standards (Tinto 1993, Pascarella, Smart, and Nettles

19987). Astin (1982 p 97) found that a minority student's perceived academic ability is a positive determinant of future academic success. These students were fortunate to have had positive, advanced school placements, and the two low placements were challenged and changed due to the objection of parents.

Some of the study participants' parents involved themselves in all aspects of their child's education. In the case of Fred D. we notice that his mother was successful in overturning a placement decision made by the school. Fred D. said that:

my parents at that time had no college experience, high school diploma was it. I would say that I was definitely expected to go to college but if I chose not to, that was ok too. It was known that I definitely was going, there was no doubt about it. I think, looking back its probably the push that my parents made to make sure that I was doing good in school, checking up on me. When I was in elementary school I actually wasn't doing too good, especially in the second grade. I was doing horribly and they made the push, specifically my mother, to make sure that I was back on track. She even looked into my educational placement, probably around the fourth or fifth grade. The school had me in two different programs, I was in the high level math program but the lowest level reading program. For some reason they stuck me in the lowest level reading, and I still don't understand to this day why, and she definitely didn't understand at that time but she went to the school and made them retest me. The retesting proved that I definitely shouldn't have been in the lowest level reading. I was either medium or high, but not low. I should have been on at least a regular level with the other students. The basic proof for my mother was, how could I read a math book at the highest level and the school was trying to tell her that I was reading at the lowest level - (Fred laughed) - no way would she hear that). To her, with only a high school diploma, reading a math book at the highest level was just as difficult as any other book, and you know what, she was right. I was also reading Spanish for my Spanish class at grade level, so it was just a funny omission. So that proved to me that you must always have confidence in your ability. I am grateful to her for pushing because I was just satisfied with whatever I was told, I didn't know that I shouldn't have been in that class. I was young and didn't give it a thought. I just remember feeling that I couldn't read as well as the other students. I was also embarrassed that my mother would create a scene in front of my teachers and classmates. It almost happened that I would see my self as not being as bright as my white classmates when it wasn't true. I



almost believed it until she, my mother, really pushed to find out what was going on and made an extra effort to make sure that I was in the level I should have been at. After that I always realized that I had wonderful parents and they were always behind me every step of the way but it didn't matter ... my mother helped to give me the self assuredness I need to realize that I am really intelligent, I love her for it.

Nick M. offers a very insightful explanation of the potential for damage to a student's academic concept by placement in tracks or programs that are understood by the participant to meet the needs of those individuals that are academically deficient. Nick M. tells us that:

Before we go to my high school experience a word about the tracking system. Me and another Black student were in the class together everytime, that was it. Out of thirty to thirty-three kids we were the only two Black students, no Puerto Rican students, in the advanced track. Most of them were tracked at a lower level and it was clear, I mean they were called the dumb classes and by the white students. The middle tier classes were somewhat mixed with white, Black and Puerto Rican students but the lower tiers were glutted with us. Even if the students in the upper tiers performed poorly they believed that they could always do better if they wanted to, it was a psyche job - if you are told you are smart you believe it, and if you are told that you are dumb you will believe it.

Fred's mother was instrumental in preventing the school system from continuing with a placement error which may have had a lasting negative effect on him. It was to some extent, accepted by Fred as his deficiency. I am not sure that this type of placement error would have been corrected with the support system that was available to Richard S. and Nick M. Their parents appeared to rely exclusively on the school system to do the right thing. Of course, in the case of Fred D's. situation, it would require that the school system question many of its decisions, decisions made in good faith.

In the profiles I remind you of the positive self-concept of all the study participants, but direct your attention to John J.

concerning his view of the damage done to those students placed in lower tracks and the confidence of those students placed in the advanced track. John J. tells us that:

Since I had good grades I believed that I was smart, at least smart enough to succeed in any college. I always had this idea that I was going to college and since I was in accelerated classes, I thought of myself as being smart. Some of us may not have had the best grades, but we still thought that we were smart because we were at least situated in these classes, set apart from the rest of the student body. That gave us somewhat of a different identify, I think that was very important --- very important for those of us in those classes (JJ appeared to be troubled by his words) ), perhaps damaging to students in lower tracks. The assignment to an accelerated class was such a confidence builder. I did come to the realization early in my high school experience that many of the students placed in the lower tracks were just as smart, and in many instances much smarter. Unfortunately they did not have confidence, the confidence gained by having someone tell them that they were smart. They had been labeled as slow from the very beginning and I, along with my friends, was labeled as smart --- We sort of understood that when we entered Kindergarten, the indoctrination process probably started with me when I was an infant. My uncle and mother would be fighting until this very moment if the school had placed me in a slow track. Being in an accelerated track was a big boost to my self esteem, a self esteem builder for me and my friends.

The study participants generally believed that labeling students as slow did no more than result in the student accepting the label and confirming the fact that the assignment was correct. It did not necessarily mean that the assignment was accurate as observed in the case of Fred D. The benefit of placement in a high or advanced track seems to be immense, furthering the feeling of belief in the learner's abilities while strengthening positive academic self-concept.

According to Steven R., he was placed in a higher track simply because he repeated a grade and was tested on subject matter that he had studied for two consecutive semesters. This did not reflect his ability to learn, it was simply a reflection of his familiarity with the subject matter after repeating the grade. Steven tells us that:

In the fourth grade I got left back and that was a very traumatic experience for me in that, although I didn't give it much weight at the time, the reaction of friends made me see the importance of studying because instead of feeling sorry for me, they thought it was funny. I think that was a turning point for me, up until that point I didn't give much weight to school not really doing work, not really paying attention in class, I just floated along. After that particular point something happened, after I repeated the grade I was put in one of the higher classes. I guess that was because of the fact that I knew the material so they wanted to give me more of a challenge. By putting me in that class, putting me with students who took school serious and participated and enjoyed it, I can distinctly remember that as the turning point in my grades. The material was the same but basically it was different because it was a, I guess a different interest, a different pace than it had been before, and I found it more interesting. That all happened as a result of repeating the fourth grade. I now found myself in a position that I really never thought that I would be in, I was in the highest track and I was one of the top students in my school, maintaining honor grades. In fact. fifth to ninth grade and then later on in law school, the two time periods of school where I got very high grades. Seventh grade was about the first time I ever gave serious thought to college and a need for college.

We see that in this instance, Steven inadvertently benefited in a positive way from what could have been a disastrous experience. He credits his mother, a religious woman with a ninth grade education, with his confidence in him self. He states that, "my mother told me that God was sending him a message and he should pay more attention to his school work (Steven laughed and said 'my classmates were also sending me a message')." He reports that she had confidence in him and refused to allow him to quit.

John A. tells us of the importance of achieving placed on him by his peers. Although parents may not recognize certain peer pressure placed on their child as a result of their actions, the following instances are examples of positive outcomes. In the case of John A., his mother and her friends were very interested in the progress of the neighborhood children and he tells us that;



there was a group of us, about six to eight in the neighborhood, our parents knew each other and we developed a real competitive spirit for the best report card. We didn't like for our parents to get together and one parent say that one of us should get grades like the other.

He also tells us that his parents would offer him valuable and needed praise in building self-confidence when he states that:

I had very good parents, and I praise God for having them because they were very important in building the confidence in me needed to believe in myself in the sense that they recognized my accomplishments and they built on those. I didn't always do things that made them happy and they corrected me for those, but they were really good about recognizing my achievements, and that included school.

Preparing these persisters for unforeseen barriers and obstacles was as important to parents as preparation to make the grade.

Parents, intuitively and through their personal experience of growing up black, knew that their children would be confronted with discouragement and hostility. They attempted to address these possibilities as the following statements suggests. In the case of Marion P, he tells us that:

I cannot stress this point enough, that my parents, as I think back, created an atmosphere in our home which said that (education) is important, and if you are going to succeed, you will have to get serious about school, and this is how you do it!

John J's remarks show more directness in addressing specific problems without burdening him with thoughts that would have potential for interfering with his precollege learning and adjustment. He tells us of the advice his parents offered in making him aware of problems and the delicate task of preparation for obstacles and barriers that he would face and the strength needed to get back on path:

my parents never pointed out any special racial concerns, they seemed very aware that I was in that type of environment and I think they took extra effort to make sure that I was

comfortable, that I was mentally prepared for that type of environment. Now that I know what they were doing, I realize that their constant admonishments of 'don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it, you're as good or better than anybody in that class, be proud of who you are, be proud of your color', was essential for my survival. It was almost as though they knew that I would be getting some sort of feedback that would be negative and they would always load me up with this encouraging message throughout my younger years. And that, as I believe with most Blacks, would come in handy throughout my life.

Family members and others played a significant role in transmitting values and shaping an identity of self during the early years of the participants. The value of a positive self-image and identity was reported by the participants as being important to them when faced with discouragement and obstacles on their campuses. The value of early familial guidance is observed in their experience of preparing for college, succeeding in college, and finding the internal fortitude and confidence which was important to succeeding in their precollege college and later, college studies. Before returning to the on-campus experience of the persisters, I will continue with a brief discussion consistent with the above highlighting the role of parents in preparing their child for college. I will allow the participant voices to share with us the importance and significance of the role of family members, particularly parents, in building confidence and determination to succeed.

#### Early family intervention as a key to academic Preparation

The twenty-five African American degree completers were from all regions of the country, graduates of highly selective small and large private institutions, small and large public institutions, and public and private institutions more inclusive in their admissions standards (see table). Although the study participants were diverse in terms of

their backgrounds, the familial attitudes toward education were remarkably similar. Their families placed a high value on education; it was apparent, as explained in the excerpts taken from participants' stories earlier in this chapter and the five participants introduced to you in chapter four, that college degree completion was not an option but almost a requirement, certainly, at least an expectation.

Much of what was presented and documented from the participants' statements underscore the importance of family involvement, particularly during the early educational experience of those in this sample. The sooner the involvement of parents in the process the greater the chance of success of the persister at all levels of learning. It is also significant to note that early parent and significant other involvement is crucial to the entire notion of building a positive self-concept (Astin, 1994).

Several examples of how early parental and significant other involvement was seen in the statements of the persisters. The involvement of individuals did not consistently appear as obvious attempts to build self-concept. In several cases it was presented as an intervention resulting from something which was perceived as placing the child in harms way. Careful examination of Fred's statement concerning his mother's involvement when he was placed in a lower reading track was not a planned intervention. It was obviously an unplanned intervention unrelated to any issues of self-concept. It would appear as though his mother was more concerned with fairness, fairness in treatment as it relates to objective assignment of Fred to an appropriate reading level. According to Fred, this intervention



was significant/important to the development of his self-esteem. He found this to be vitally important in his future educational experience.

In certain instances we notice that certain actions appear to be designed to encourage the persister to develop a feeling of self confidence and reliance, all of which would appear to be the development of positive self-concept. The activities were vastly different from one intervention to the next. Although in the case of Norman B, John A. and John J., family members used different approaches, but it would appear as though the action was specifically intended to encourage self-confidence. Norman's mother stressed the idea that her children could achieve, accomplishing whatever they set as a goal. Perhaps, due to his mother's lack of formal education, she did not structure her guidance in a fashion similar to that of John A's parents and John J's uncle. However, it was clear that Norman's mother created an opportunity for him to meet an African American male, considered to be a community leader by Norman, that offer guidance and selected his undergraduate college.

Other study participants shared a similar experience in selecting a college. Only four of the sixteen interviewees received assistance from their parent(s) in selecting a college. Although parental participation existed with the four participants, two offered no opinion as to their preference. Fred D. and Sean P's parents went with them to visit colleges and following the visits, their parents told their sons that they would attend Hofstra University and Boston University respectively. John A's parents, after advising him that he must find a college offering full scholarship, drove him to visit

colleges that his teachers, coaches, and friends recommended; he made the final selection. Marion P's parents also placed restrictions on the process of selecting. Marion was not to leave the state of Texas and he had to select a college at least six hours driving time from his parents' home.

John A's mother was very deliberate in her attempt to be visible in those activities which were school related. He found her attendance at PTA meetings, parent-teacher conferences and special school events. He found her presence at any school event to be a source of great pride; particularly when he had an opportunity to display his class project. Whenever the school event required display of his work, special motivation accompanied the preparation of his work. John A. stated that he worked especially hard when his mother would visit because he wanted her to see what an outstanding job he was doing. It was clear that he valued her admiration and approval of his work.

Parents were quite different in their approach to offering support to their children, ranging from techniques which appear to be deliberate planned interventions to offering encouragement. John A's mother offered a direct bridge between the support he received in the home and what was going on in and around the classroom. Other parents and family members were encouraging but not necessarily in what appeared to be a planned manner. It was more in how they responded--more symbolic. The following comment from Norman B. is an example of general support.

First of all I think that the main support system came from my family. I had encouragement, of course, from my mother. She offered a sense of responsibility, a sense of obligation to continue my education, to persist in college, to graduate and to

succeed, I knew it was important to her, and of course it was important to me. The first and most important support that I received was from my family, brother and sisters who were, supporting and encouraging. They would always remember to encourage me from my early childhood through college and graduate school. When I came home for visits they would give me words of encouragement, small amounts of money here and there, listening when I talked about my experiences, visiting my college campus and sending little packages at Thanksgiving and Christmas. That was the type of support they gave me, it was definitely there and helped me succeed throughout my educational experience.

John J. stated that his parents, "drilled the idea of college in us with every available opportunity. My folks would always say 'you want to get a good job, then after high school you go to college'." This message was important to John, offering him a sense of purpose which is seen in the following:

My friends and I to this very day still talk about our high school experience and how bad the education was and how much of a game of catch up we had to play when we went to college. Our guidance counselors really didn't do a very good job. There were no Black guidance counselors, and the white counselors discouraged us in a number of ways. I mean, my friend Bobby, he works at the Pentagon right now, he, just the other day was telling me how his guidance counselor told him that he should consider a trade school or some other vocation but certainly not college. He said that he looked at her and thought that she must be crazy. Bobby, a part of my group of high school friends, had confidence in his abilities and strong family support. He said that he sat there and appeared very attentive, not listening to a word she said. I mean, we were taught to respect people in positions of authority but not to believe that white people were interested in our success, at least not as they expected it for white males. You understand, our parents and relatives taught us to appear interested but block-out the words. Black people have seen too much suffering and struggling by placing a great deal of confidence in the advice of whites. Bobby's father had some college but worked as a cook and waiter all of his life; my uncle had some college and worked as an outreach worker, a position not requiring a high school diploma, for a community based agency; my mother had some college and worked as a domestic; the examples are far too numerous based on my limited experience. In order to get the type of jobs that we wanted, we understood, or at least we were given the impression, that you needed a college degree in order to find out about and obtain certain positions. So we had some idea as to how we should go about getting to the point where we wanted to be. We had a vague idea of certain necessary steps and we clearly understood that



college was one of the most important steps getting us to where we sort of envisioned ourselves.

Much work was done by parents in preparing their sons to succeed in college. The self identity and strong determination to be successful in school was traced to the families during their early years in the home. Richard stated that his mother, not a formally educated woman, "taught him to be self reliant, self confident and motivated." He said that, "without my mother's early guidance I would have become so demoralized and discourage that I would have dropped out during my freshman year."

### Academic support and Persistence

#### Introduction

Higher education in the United States has undergone a significant transformation since WW II. We have seen increased federal involvement, particularly after the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The Act resulted in a redefinition of federal government's role with an emphasis on advancing the educational rights of individuals, an expansion of student aid including such programs as the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (BEOG Program) which was later replaced by PELL Grants, and the College Work Study program. According to Astin (1993), these programs could be grouped into four federal program categories that contributed to minority participation in higher education. He classified them as Institutional Aid Programs, Student Financial Aid Programs, Special Programs (Access and Persistence), and Professional Training and Human Resource Development.

Special Programs impacting access and persistence is one area of the university retention effort, particularly the retention of African American students, receiving a tremendous amount of attention in the literature. The 1965 legislation allowed for increased opportunity for many more academically and financially disadvantaged students to enroll in predominantly white colleges, while opening the doors for the first time on other campuses. Expanded recruitment and the increased number of historically white colleges reaching out to students was immediately noticeable throughout the nation. These colleges and universities, those that had discouraged African American admissions from the time they opened and those that had excluded certain groups of students, were now expected to extend a helping hand. Many African American students entered the campus community in need of academic assistance, others in need of financial assistance, while yet another group in need of both, and perhaps a few only wanted to be offered equal access to the opportunity of a college education.

As I reviewed the transcripts of the participants, I realized that these white institutions developed programs to address the deficiencies of a few that had been generalized to all college bound African American students. These perceived deficiencies did not exist in many instances. Only three of the participants in the study sample required special academic support. Although the three recognized their deficiencies and requested admission under the admission standards of special programs, ten of the sixteen participants were placed in support programs. These students were judged to be academically deficient and programs were planned and put in place to

confirm that belief. According to Weis and Fine (1993) African American students enter predominately white colleges and universities assigned to a category with special needs. These students are enrolled with the intent of interrupting the cycle of failure.

We will take a closer look at the retention effort these students reported with an emphasis on their response to college assistance offered based on the perceived needs of African Americans. First, I will examine the college programs available to assist students and then examine the efforts devised by students to assist in their own persistence.

#### College initiated academic support Programs

These young men were assigned to a category which was designed to fix something which was broken, broken similarly in every manner. The category made no distinction based on individual talents and/or deficiencies. They were perceived as deficient and placement in programs to address predetermined deficiencies confirmed the perception. Success would only strengthen the belief that the prescription worked; failure would serve to underscore the seriousness of the problem, resulting in documentation that increased and more concentrated amounts of the same would produce positive outcomes.

Participants reported that they were advised of their need to participate in special programs inspite of their belief that it was unnecessary. Tony W. was uneasy about this arbitrary placement, expressing concern that it was not only discouraging but divisive. He states that:

Georgetown had a very interesting (support) program. We used to call it a three year Scholarship Program, and what they would do



is attract good -- again by their definition --- talented minority incoming freshman to partake in a summer enrichment program more or less. You basically got to come down and take a couple of classes, and basically meet some of the professors. It's funny, I think now, and this is not --- you start thinking about racism and you start to see a little bit of it now with the way Georgetown handled that (program). Basically what they did was, they had Black kids who were encouraged to attend this program and other students who were not. And I saw major divisiveness within the student community in September of your freshman year depending on whether you attended this program or not.

Tony was not only troubled by strained relations between entering freshmen, but was concerned about the academic benefit he personally received from such an effort. He tells us that:

You know, I personally felt, coming from my educational program (Canterbury School in Milford, Connecticut), I probably did not need to be there because afterwards (in his Junior year at Georgetown) I found out that the program was intended for students with some kind of educational deficiency or whatever. Now, if they told me I had to come down there and take math, I would agree with them because I'm a terrible math student, and I always was, but basically I took English and philosophy courses and other things I'm really good at, such as reading comprehension during my three weeks down there. Except for the fact that it acclimated me toward a couple of professors that supported this program, I didn't see any kind of great advantage to me. But it did strike me as not odd, but it struck me as a little condescending that they broke up the students that way, before they even entered college.

Not all students accepted the college's unauthorized placement, particularly since they had no prior knowledge of these programs and what benefit they should expect from their involvement. Lacy J. objected to the intrusions and refused to participate:

A special program designed to meet the needs of a particular group of students was an orientation program during the summer that preceded the academic semester by three weeks. I refused to participate in it because I thought that it was remedial, but there were students that did. I guess it was another way that Black students came together and I guess it was --- they had an opportunity to exert themselves academically as well as feeling some type of security socially. Personally, I resented being labeled particularly since I graduated at the top of my high school class with a 1400 SAT and a white graduate from my high school, my classmate, was admitted to the same college without

any requirements or recommendations for assistance. My high school academic, community, and extra-curricular record was far superior to his.

These programs were intended for African American students for, what I believe to be, a number of noble reasons which included social contact with other students, introduction to a concerned faculty, assisting with counseling and identifying financial resources. I suppose these retention programs made a deliberate and conscientious effort to provide all of the services suggested above, but they were also designed to strengthen these students academically so that they would eventually reach the standard required of entering freshmen. This, then, is one of the major failings of such an effort, given the financial cost and confusing message being sent to the students in the program and those outsiders observing the programs.

Lacy and Tony were not appropriate for their college's retention programs, they did not request the programs, nor did they realize that they had been assigned to a program intended to meet the needs of students with deficiencies. Obviously the special programs they found on their campuses did not consider such details as the individualized needs of the student, the student's past academic performance, the potential harm to students without the self confidence and identity to handle this impersonal labeling, and a determination as to whether or not the program is required. It was clear from Lacy that this program had more to say about his dark skin than it did about his ability to perform at the college level. Tony's observation that the program contained some elements of "racism...in the way (it was) handled." I,

to a large extent, agree with his observation. It was very clear in Lacy's case that the program spoke more directly to race inequality than it did to student deficiencies.

Nick M, one of the three participants that requested and admitted as a student in need of special support program, was able to get his average up to a 3.2 and at that point didn't believe that he continued to need a support program stated that:

I think as an administrative normality I was just put in that program. I did not want a support program nor did I need one, my average was about a B minus --- I guess it was just the official home for so called minority students. It appeared to me that all minority students, all Black students at least, were assigned to this program. They had no Black students at the time attending as regular students that I knew of, now there probably were some, I just didn't know of any. My dealing with the support program was for the social aspect. They received copies of your grades and I guess other shit that they weren't entitled to. They had some kind of setup for you to get tutors and I don't know what else. But I just never took advantage, I mean I just didn't think I really needed that. I was trying to figure my way through the system but I didn't really need any help with getting to the administration, you know, I just made my own way at that point and I was able to get my business done. I pretty much structured my own support system or retention program.

Nick M, when discussing his feelings concerning the faculty and staff attitudes on issues involving access and retention activities of the support program on his campus tells us that, "I think the attitude was that it was enough just to open the door. Not very much thought was given to the success of the students. That (access) was their (faculty and staff) missionary bit." He recognized the value of his college's support program in reaching out to students and offering them an opportunity to participate at the college level. Although he recognized and gave credit to the program for assisting African American and Puerto Rican students financially and with social contacts, he did not see a great deal of positive academic support



available from this college effort. The following statement is by Nick M. does not contradict anything we heard from Tony or Lacy.

... the Urban Ed program, I believe, could have saved a lot of us, white and Black students. Retention of students was the theory behind Urban Ed at the time but it wasn't run well, it was just a structure without any guts, without anything inside of it. We were affiliated with that program, it got us into school, it would get us tutors if we needed them, there was a cadre of sympathetic professors that went out of their way to help that student population but that was it. ... It's like this, You are up there bullshitting and nobody is checking up on you, you just play yourself right out of the old opportunity and that's what happened to most of the (African American students) brothers and sisters. The Urban Education program failed many students. It provided an open door and left you standing. The program claimed you as theirs---I imagined they were hoping for successes (degree completion) in order to claim credit - I am not sure if they claimed responsibility for the failures."

Richard S, another student admitted to college through one of the special programs was very clear that the program gave him an opportunity to go to college by opening the door. He thought that the program was successful in assisting with finances and social activities.

I was admitted to college due to the existence of a retention program. They brought us in, three weeks early, prior to starting my freshman year. This was an excellent opportunity to meet other Black students and two very supportive Black faculty members. Our program didn't offer a great deal to any of us and I believe my success in completing college was due to my ability to avoid the remedial offerings and white staff working in the program. They were there for a paycheck and, I felt, displayed a condescending attitude toward the Black students. My support came from two Black professors that I found on campus and a white professor that reached out to me in my sophomore year.

Norman B. in telling of his contact with the office offering assistance to African American students states that:

On the campus itself, we did have an office of minority student services. It didn't have a lot of power to make decisions in regards to enrollment and other matters. It was there to support Black students, particularly on a social level. An office or an individual that you can depend on to provide some kind of social activities on my campus was very important.

The following comment by Mike O. tends to focus more on the larger issue of Affirmative Action programs which are under attack during this presidential election. As we move closer to November 1996 and the Clinton - Dole election debates "heat" up, I am sure that we will hear discussions on the harm and benefit to African Americans and others of special (educational and employment) programs. Perhaps Mike O., in response to criticism of special programs to assist African Americans tells us that:

Ideology allows a white person, when he or she sees a Black person, to assume that the person shouldn't be in a job or school because they're incompetent. It is just founded out of ignorance. Ignorance of themselves, ignorance of Black people, ignorance of history. It is really unfortunate because I think that if people don't take time to read the books, and particularly if it's not incorporated into your learning experience as you're growing up, you're going to be woefully ignorant of the fact, or of how for 350 years these white people in America systematically and unremittingly locked, or tried to lock Black people out of this society. We were locked out educationally, economically, even the churches were locked to us; they were all closed to us, and all of this was done systematically. It was codified in the laws, codified in people's cultural beliefs and behavior; so, if I am a little behind, I am not going to feel bad about it. I think I've done damn well to be where I am, given all the bullshit and all of the hoops that not only I, but Blacks as a people have been forced to jump through. --- there's no way in the world that any white people and any white person in America is going to tell me that I'm an Affirmative Action case. If I am so what, so what, I'm only getting my due. I mean, there's no way in the world you're going to make up 350 years in 30 years.

Michael, a student of government and history, spoke with a great deal of passion as he eloquently spoke to the issue of college support programs. He viewed these programs or comparable efforts as indispensable in providing access, social introductions and financial support for needy students. Mike was not as certain of the role or

extent of involvement these programs should have in the academic life of students in matters, which he believed, best left to faculty. This view was reflected in his comment that:

"all members of the faculty, particularly white male faculty must assume an increased more positive role and responsibility in the academic life of African American male students."

He viewed the academic development and progress of students as something best left with the faculty, adding that they, "must serve as mentors, friends, and assume the role of parent if necessary".

#### Succeeding required self identified Initiatives

Participants either did not have an academic support program available to them or they did not perceive that the existing academic support programs were able to address their needs. Many found themselves searching for a way or some mechanism to assist them in their persistence to degree completion. Finding a way to accomplish the objective of degree completion was not an easy task. They indicated that the desire, determination, and strength found which confirmed their resolve to succeed was within, and the supports to help in their success were either developed or identified by them.

The value of retention programs was most frequently seen to be access, financial support, and social opportunities. The colleges' academic support programs were not seen as significant and in most instances relevant nor helpful. As reported from the narratives in the preceding pages, the desire to satisfy parents and the lasting affect of parental teachings, including self concept, was viewed as the sustaining power which carried over into college,



particularly in terms of keeping students on path or the "road" to degree or getting those students back on path that strayed. Faculty support was viewed as critical by the participants and peer support was also considered as important.

These students entered the academy with a goal they had a sense of purpose or a certainty of purpose. Students entering college with a certainty of purpose should be considered as possessing qualities favorable to persistence (Tinto, 1993). As I listened to the tapes containing the comments of the participants and reviewed their transcripts of their words, it was clear that a sense of confidence and their purpose was undeniable. As we observed earlier, John J points to lessons he learned in the home which offered him a goal, a sense of purpose. The statement which he shared with us indicating that his family had repeatedly stressed the importance of an education points to clarity he possessed of a goal. His education was intended to accomplish an objective, an objective which was introduced to him by his parents at an early age. His parents encouraged him to "go to college (in order to) get a good job". Other students stated that they were told by their parents that they needed a college education in order to obtain a decent job.

Faculty were sought out by students and reported as significant to their degree completion. The men in this study sample clearly recognized the importance of faculty support at various levels if they were to succeed in college. Twelve of the sixteen participants reported that they developed a long term relationship (two or more years) with one or more faculty members. It was also discovered that only two of the close faculty relationships started as advisee-advisor

introductions. Most frequently students sought faculty members out or met them while taking one of their courses. The students viewed the relationships as friendships, a person that they could go to with most any personal or social problem and any academic or administrative concern.

Marion P, one of the four students not reporting any special association with a faculty member, stated that all faculty were there to help students. He stated that he:

...was aggressive in approaching (faculty) to get whatever I needed to succeed. It was clear to me that they had well defined responsibilities and functions as teachers and so did I as a student, my parents stressed that from our early grades. I was always taught that you approach people for whatever you need and believe that they have some responsibility to assist.

Many students are able to approach faculty, staff or other students for assistance based on what they understand that person's responsibilities to be; they seek no more and no less. This, I believe is a rare and exceptional individual, perhaps an individual that may lose out on benefiting from a person's encouragement, kindness, support, concern, and complete knowledge. Viewing people as dispensers of information may provide you with answers to the questions as you framed them, but it is always possible that the question is framed in such a way that the answer will reveal only one side of a two sided coin. More important, many students need to believe that the person in a position of knowing is concerned and interested. From our earlier analysis we heard that message from a number of study participants.

Richard S. reported that his questions were answered, but the answers appeared to be vague and misleading, resulting in his withdrawal and conclusion that white male instructors had no desire to

assist him. Some students need faculty to reach out to them and help formulate the question. Perhaps it is also a deeper relationship that they are in search of, a nurturing (father-son, uncle - nephew or just a simple friendship) relationship that they as adolescents are looking for. This relationship was found by fifteen of the sixteen participants in the study sample; it was found from Black and white female faculty and Black male faculty. The dominant group that these participants interacted with, white male faculty, were perceived as not caring and frequently reported as sending a message that Black students were not able to compete academically and were not welcome.

An important most compelling and moving report of assistance from a faculty member was the friendship that John A. reported. Perhaps his experience summarized best the importance of faculty support and friendship in helping students succeed. He was able to develop a close friendship with a faculty member which he credits with rescuing him from near academic catastrophe. With the assistance of a white philosophy instructor that took an interest in him, he was able to bring his life back together, remembering those things that he was taught by his family as a young child. John A. tells us that:

He helped me to see the end and the life I could have if I did certain things, he helped me lay out a path to get there and then he basically said it is on you, if you really want it, if you do these things you will achieve it. Again, it was great that for the first time in a long while someone helped to give me the vision, put me back on path and then encourage me.

The instructor made certain positive assumptions concerning John's early learning and his experience within the family. He relied on the strengths that John entered the college with in order to redirect him, to help him rediscover the purpose of the journey and the way back to the road from which he had strayed.



For the majority of these students it was simply a matter of relying on each other for support. We heard from many of the participants reporting on the importance of finding other African American students to study with and socialize with in their effort to succeed. The individual initiative of these students created for them what the classroom and special programs could not make happen. Edwin told us about his difficulties in engineering and being left out of study groups that formed in the classroom. He found a math major, Enrique, that agreed to a double major so that they could form for themselves what the college programs could not provide. Richard S. told of his experience in working with other African American students. We will now hear from others and their experience of creating a support network for themselves. Norman B. tells us that:

...having other students of color on campus was extremely important, even though there were very few of us in my freshman and sophomore year, we were very close. The support made it a lot easier for all of us to be succeed. Of course, you know, there were students who dropped out along the way, but I think that having the support from other students was very important.

Lacy J., as with Norman, also recognized the value of these groups in meeting academic and social needs of African American students. He states that "we supported each other, we formed study groups and we helped friends, we were truly a support group for academic and social survival."

Tony W. offer a slightly different take on the importance these groups in helping students succeed in the classroom. He tells that:

I always felt when it got tough, and there were times when it did get tough, I always felt that it would become a major mark of shame not to finish my degree. The reason why I felt that way was because the Black students would talk about students who didn't finish, or who were taking five or six years to complete their degree; you were ostracize, I mean there was no doubt

about it. I think that this was a competitiveness that we felt white students placed on us, so we did not look favorably at Black students that didn't carry their weight --- it was definitely like a black mark next to your name if you were not keeping up with the pace, it would definitely make the gossip lounge. I guess you could say they became something like a peer support group, because you didn't want to cross them and say something like 'I was placed on academic probation, I won't be here next semester'. When you came back that's all you would hear --- 'he is on academic probation, he didn't carry his weight, he fucked up'. That was very prevalent at Georgetown --- if you needed help, they (Black student leaders) expected you to ask one of them or a Black professor before you started falling behind.

The pressure or perceived pressure successful African American students place on each other is not an uncommon experience. College success is important to African Americans and achievements are viewed as something good for the entire group. John J, Alonzo C, John A, and others told us, earlier in this chapter, of the competitive spirit that they had benefited from and learned to take pride in at a very young age.

Participants spoke of division within the African American student body, particularly in terms of maintaining their self-identity. John A. told us that:

- You had the white fraternities, sororities and service organizations that benefited from the planning of social activities for students. I think I should say this before going on, essentially there were two types of Black students at Lafayette College: 1) There were those Black students that came in sort of like my roommate who, I would say, adapted themselves to the environment and became part of the fraternities and sorties. The majority of their friends might have been white, and many of them changed the way they dressed and spoke, you know what I mean. 2) Then there was another group that really worked hard at maintaining our culture and identity. I was a part of that group - We had our own little community.

He continues with the following statement:

My first year roommate became a member of one of the white fraternities and got involved in their house and eventually that kind of led to his demise (JA laughs). The partying and constant drinking, that was not what he needed. His white friends didn't

care, he was their athlete and their entertainment. ... my roommate was a knuckle head I thought, because he was the type, he wanted to go to those pub nights and you know, he was perfectly delighted to give up his identity to be around whites. ... He was going out there every night, coming in late, throwing up after having drank all night. We were very different when it came to our social preferences. He tended to be the one to hang out with the white students, where I preferred being to myself or with the other Black students. We only had about fifty Black students, about two or three percent of the student body.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986 pp. 176-206) note that a tremendous burden is placed on African Americans due to pressure for them to deny their heritage. It is what they were refer to as the "burden of acting white".

Successfully surviving the college experience must certainly require a strong sense of self, focused on the road to take in order to complete the journey and the awareness where you came from. Researchers indicate that the relationship between whites and African Americans makes this task exceptionally difficult. The relationship is qualitatively different than the relationship between whites and other minorities, particularly Asian immigrants (Fordham 1981, 1982; Ogbu 1980, 1981, 1984). Perhaps the quality of the relationship between whites and Asian Americans and Asian immigrants is due to an apparent status which resembles that of an honorary white status (New York Post, June 13, 1996).

Due to the opposition and conflict between African Americans and whites, African Americans develop an oppositional cultural frame of reference. The oppositional identity develops because they perceive the treatment by whites to be collective and enduring oppression (Green, 1986). This idea is substantiated by Cross (1971, pp. 100-107) in his model of Black Identity Formation. Cross's model describes five stages which African Americans pass through in the development of their



black identity. The stages are: 1) Preencounter or prediscovery; 2) Encounter; 3) Immersion-Emersion; 4) Internalization; and, 5) Internationalization-Commitment.

Achieving success was important to the study participants. They carefully avoided those things which they perceived to signal danger: they refused to participate in special programs, including retention programs that offered no clear benefit; they joined forces with other African American students to plan a strategy for succeeding in an environment which they perceived to be at best unfriendly and occasionally hostile, an environment that did not welcome them nor value their potential for succeeding in an challenging academic climate. These young men also recognized the need to maintain their remaining self confidence and regain lost self-confidence. This was accomplished in large part by becoming involved in campus activities at a visible level.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the strategy pursued by these persisters in an effort to contribute to the improvement of their campus we will now turn our attention to the importance of self initiated activities. These activities ultimately represented service to the campus wide community.

### Student initiated involvement/activities and Persistence

#### Introduction

The unspoken words of their white peers and faculty that set them apart and made them feel uneasy did not prevent the participants from finding a way to succeed. We have just examined the reported student initiated activities which aided the participants to succeed

in college. This final section will complement the preceding remarks and increase our understanding of measures undertaken to reassure their self-confidence and identity.

After the first and second year of college, the participants became involved in many activities intended to benefit their classmates and their colleges. Thirteen of the sixteen participants became involved in leadership/extracurricular activities at the college level; only four of the sixteen were engaged in similar activities at the high school level. The discouragement experienced was undoubtedly a major contributing factor to the high percentage (81%) of participation in leadership/extracurricular activities.

In examining the attitude of these participants toward leadership qualities they displayed, positions of leadership they held, and the influence they exercised, I discovered that most did not readily identify themselves as leaders. Instead, they viewed leadership functions as something that had to be done to help them and other African Americans "survive the (college) experience." Positions of leadership and influence was clearly a way that these men gained recognition, status and a voice that was heard, all of the things they were denied in the classroom. Norman B. recognized the importance of involvement in campus activities as a way to strengthen the efforts of African American students as evidenced in the following statement:

...now the few of us (African American students) who were there, I must say that we were actively involved in campus life - I don't want to convey the impression that we excluded ourselves from participation in campus activities - because being there it was important for us to be involved in campus activities, so we were actively involved. I think that student study and social groups are important, but you need to influence campus decisions. I think that is also an important part of persistence and it served as an important support for in us in our effort to persist.

## Participation

The participation patterns engaged in were as varied as each situation required and individual persister's unique style dictated. The patterns ranged from minimal participation, as in limiting classroom involvement until required to do so, to unrelenting energy and talent invested in having their voices heard on campus issues of social, political, organizational, and in general issues which were perceived by them as impacting the lives of students.

Since the strategy of non-participation in class discussions relieved teachers and classmates of any opportunity and responsibility to provide helpful feedback, feelings of not-belonging were given some legitimacy. They were ignored and left alone to benefit from assigned readings and the discussions of others. Mike O. employed the non-participation strategy but expressed a sense of incomplete learning because he felt that he could not have his views discussed in the classroom. Many of these students, without any past significant leadership experience except in the field of athletics, began to gain recognition and support in a wide range of student interest.

## Religion

The importance of religion, which was introduced to them at a very young age by their parents, was frequently reported by these persisters as a source of internal strength which they often relied on and continue to rely on when faced with difficulty. The sense of church, religion and God was discussed as being of fundamental



importance to their ability to cope. This belief in God allowed them to find the needed strength to persist on their hostile campuses where they faced discouragement, mistrust and acts of racism.

The early religious teachings were credited for enhancing the social life of one participant, offering strength to overcome racism for another and for another, assisting in turning his grades around.

John A. tells us that:

I am from a very religious environment, my mother was a deaconess in the Methodist church and we always went to church every Sunday. Religion was always a part of my life...I was raised a certain way, taught to love God but I got lost along the way, perhaps starting in high school and it continued for a while in college. But then, I have to tell you, without going back to my Christian family experience while in college, I would not have made it. In my sophomore year I finally got back to my family teachings and re-discovered the church, that really turned things around for me and I've been a different person since.

Church was very important to John A. and he found it available to him when he was having difficulty making the grade at Lafayette.

Marion P, one of the participants, did not experience the feeling of getting away from his religious teachings. He grew up in a household where he reports that "church consumed our entire life, it was where we found meaning. You were everything that you were supposed to be in that church." Marion went on to describe those things that the church offered individuals in various age groups.

Mike O, also from a very religious family reports that his parents "were religious people, spiritual people who created a loving environment for their children. They fought, they had their problems, but basically they created a loving environment and had a beautiful sense of how to treat everybody." He states that he was taught to respect and treat others as you wanted to be treated. Richard S.

shares a similar sense of fairness taught by his parents through their religious urgings. He states that:

My parents encouraged us to do the right thing, treat everyone with respect. They encouraged us to do the good things that all the other kids were doing and of course, we went to church, as a matter of fact we were in church every morning, it was an early morning mass...we were in church every morning as well as on Sunday. My parents were involved in our church life more so than they were in school.

Ten of the sixteen participants included in this sample reported that their belief in a god or a superior power provided them with the internal strength to succeed in degree completion. Fifteen of the sixteen reported regular church attendance until their sophomore or junior year in high school.

### Travel

Many other factors relating to student initiated involvement were considered to be significant in contributing to success. They included clubs, fraternities, student organizations, travel, and employment just to mention a few. Four of the students spoke of the importance being able to spend a semester studying abroad. The value gained from the experience was reported as invaluable by the four students that traveled. Steven R. states that:

my second semester of my second year I had seen a flyer or poster concerning study abroad. I thought how nice that would be to study abroad. I went to the few meetings they held and realized I could not afford to pay, my family couldn't afford to pay and my grades were not high enough, I thought, to receive a scholarship, so I stopped going to the meetings. The professor in charge of the group asked me why I had stopped coming to the seminars. I told him my concerns and he mentioned that the scholarship was based on grades but it was also based on needs and potential of the individual involved - he suggested that I should continue, if for no other reason, I would know that I give it a good shot as opposed to dropping ... I was one of the individuals who did receive a scholarship to Europe for the summer of 1974. That opened my eyes ... I started to see things

that I never thought I would see in this world and I totally enjoyed it ... a stipulation I made was that I did not want to stay with a white family. I was the only Black and the first Black to travel abroad from the college. When we got over seas and we were doing room assignments, I found that I was with a family and I was quite upset about that ... I remember speaking to the professor and he said 'give me an opportunity and if you don't like it I will immediately pull you out, no questions asked.' I went with two other students to this family and I ended up staying the entire time with them. Not only did I enjoy the family I found that out of all of the families that everyone was placed with these were the best, as far as personality and just being alive. The mother was like Edith Bunker and the best way I can describe her is that she gave you this rattle brain type of appearance but was smart as a whip. Although the father was very domineering and supposedly the head of the family, she's the one that really ran the family ... I enjoyed that whole experience, I was the first one to go and I opened the doors for a lot of other people because after that other Black students went, one of my friends went to Japan where he spent a year as an exchange student.

Other students reported a similar successful and eye opening experience. Of those students that did not take advantage of the opportunity three pointed out their disappointment for not making a special effort to travel. Lacy J. tells us that:

... because I worked the summers in a soap factory, I did not take a student sponsored trip to Africa that I regret to this day. I could of taken out more loans, but was to shortsighted to explore that option.

### Faculty Friendship

Student-faculty friendships are extremely important to the persistence of students. Educational outcomes may be negatively or positively influenced by the quality and extent of informal contact with faculty (Pascarella and Terenzini, pp. 540-552.). According to Lenning (1982 p40), the quality of faculty and students out-of-class interactions contributes substantially to a student's college success.

Perhaps the desire to have faculty reach out to them in friendship was the one thing that they all sought. Fifteen of the



sixteen participants stated that they developed a very supportive relationship with at least one faculty or staff member. They reported that they would usually seek out African American members of the faculty and go to them for counseling, guidance, complaints, and personal problems. Although thirteen of the sixteen participants had white male faculty advisors and three had classes with African Americans faculty their first year, only two reported establishing friendships, or any sort of relationship that extended beyond attending classes taught by white male faculty.

These participants sought the support and friendship of their professors, those members of the faculty that were teaching them and serving as their faculty-advisors. They recognized the importance of this relationship, not only for academic guidance but social and personal guidance, and sought it. They sought the friendship of their classroom instructors, but felt denied basic courtesy when dealing with their classroom instructors. As Richard S. suggested earlier in this chapter, white faculty went out of their way to develop friendships with white students.

... if I saw them (white faculty) around campus they wouldn't speak. Not only would they speak to other (white) students but it seemed to me that they would go beyond speaking to other (white) students. If a social event, like a movie or a play, was on campus and of interest to them they would join the non Black, usually male students.

Richard sought out faculty for support and only found African American professors willing to listen and lend a helping hand. He pointed out that;

I found a Black faculty member, a real hard nosed guy that always asked for more, and changed my major from biology to sociology in order to talk to and take classes from concerned professors.

Richard added;

the Black professor that befriended me had about fifteen Black students from other programs that wondered into his office for informal counseling and advise. He still had his assigned advisement load, mostly white students, that appeared to be very happy with him. I wonder if the white faculty-advisors ever asked 'where have all the Black students gone' (Richard laughs).

Other students reported similar experiences as Richard's.

John A, an engineering student, changed his major twice before returning to engineering.

Looking back, I don't think my advisor probed enough to really get at the heart of what I was really interested in. Someone else did eventually but at that point no one seemed to have the interest or time to help me decide on a career or direction for the future. I then started doing something in psychology and in the meanwhile time was ticking on. I took a couple courses in economics and business, thinking maybe that's where I wanted to be. I really was floundering throughout this whole process as you can imagine.

As reported earlier in this chapter, John A. was approached by a white male instructor that reached out to him in his junior year and turned his life around. John eventually was assigned to the professor for advisement.

Conclusions

This study identified three (3) themes which were closely related to the three major related goals previously listed earlier in this chapter and in chapters one (1) and three (3).

Table 5

Major Themes Found in the Study

THEME	DESCRIPTION
Succeeding in college	this theme of succeeding in college, metaphorically speaking, was usually conveyed by the participants as "certainty of intentions" -- "certainty of intentions" was a major factor in succeeding to degree completion.
Values	the importance of values in maintaining focus and moving toward task completion.
Road leading to success	discovering the "road" to take in order to succeed.

The three goals, to a large extent, were instrumental in guiding the organization and selection of the of the categories we have reviewed earlier in this chapter. As you review the following table summarizing the organization of the data which was previously discussed, you will note that the data is not fluid nor does it neatly fit into one category. The table is only intended to assist the reader in summarizing previously presented information and re-emphasizing a framework for thinking about the findings.



Table 6

## Study Goals and Organization for Analysis

Goals	Discussion areas
Barriers	Persistence in the face of Barriers and Challenges- Academic support and persistence-
Positive Factors	Making The Grade: Preparing for College Student Initiated Involvement/Activities And Persistence-
Factors Contributing to Success	Adaptation and persistence- The Role of Family and Significant Others in Persistence- Making The Grade: Preparing for College-

I believed then as now that it was important that this analysis start and end with the subjects placed in the setting which is the focus of the study. I did not come to that understanding without hours of unsuccessful attempts to configure the data to a historical time line which, to me, started with birth and progressed in an orderly fashion to college degree completion. After a second and third reading of the participants' transcripts, it became clear that an organization and structure for analyzing the data was unfolding from the words of the participants. Accepting what was being reported, I was able to determine the nature of the problems the study participants encountered on their college campuses; how they defined and dealt with their college experiences? how they came to recognize ways to respond to circumstances, conditions, and individuals perceived to represent barriers to their success? and finally, I was able to explore how they recalled and relied on early learning to persist on traditionally white campuses.

The narratives revealed example after example of participants crediting their parent(s) and significant others for their success. They reported that their early encouragement was directly related to the love, concern, and interest their parent(s), a relative, community leader, or an admired person in the community; most identified at least two sources of early encouragement -- in most instances a parent was credited as one of the more significant influences. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the sixteen study participants and eighty-eight percent (88%) of the twenty-five (25) interviewees credited the idea of college as something they always knew was expected of them by their parent(s). The praise which was generously showered upon the parents was done so with great ease, and from the participant's excitement in bestowing praise, this researcher was impressed that these men were truly reporting what they believed to be accurate.

It is not uncommon for parents to be credited with good and positive outcomes of their children when in fact they were not significantly involved in their success. The giving of unearned credit to parents is well documented in the literature. According to Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) children often attribute "good" values to their parents when the parents really didn't participate. In other words, they retro-fitted their image of their parents to fit acceptable social norms. The data was relied on to determine the influence parents, and others, had on the success of these participants -- only the data can shed light on this issue.

In examining these data certain strengths and attributes were apparent in the stories of the sixteen study participants. The quantity and quality of examples served as convincing evidence of

significant early involvement in the shaping of attitudes and behavior about education, and how to achieve success. They learned to value education and while in college, they recognized the importance of degree completion to their parent(s), family, and significant others. As Norman indicated, his mother "offered a sense or responsibility, a sense of obligation to continue my education, to persist in college, to graduate and to succeed, I knew it was important to her..." John J. stated that his parents, "drilled the idea of college in us with every available opportunity. My folks would always say 'you want to get a good job, then after high school you go to college'." It was clear to this researcher that those words, and many others offered as proof earlier in this chapter and chapter 4, were parental messages and actions reinforcing the need for their child(ren) to value education, high expectations, and encouragement.

The stories tell us of rich threads of heritage filled with a sense of pride in self, values, love of family, respect for their elders and community leaders, all underpinned by strong religious beliefs. Which I trace to the strong ethical foundation these participants were able to take from the influence of their parents. We clearly see examples of not only self-esteem, but also moral and ethical foundations as reported by Mike O. in the following statement, "my parents were religious people, spiritual people who created a loving environment --- and had a beautiful sense of how to treat everybody ... (I) was taught to respect and treat others as you wanted to be treated." Richard S. also shared a similar sense of fairness taught by his parents through their religious urgings. He said that his parents "encouraged us to do the right thing, treat everyone with



respect." Ten of the sixteen participants included in this sample reported that their belief in a god or a superior power provided them with the internal strength to succeed in degree completion. Fifteen of the sixteen reported regular church attendance until their sophomore or junior year in high school.

Parents worked hard to create opportunities and motivation as seen with John A. with his mother's frequent visits to his school. He was able to demonstrate his talents and have them displayed for all to observe. Norman's mother was able to create an opportunity for him to meet a community leader that eventually assisted him select a college and with the financing of his education (John J., Richard S., Alonzo C., Sean P., Mike O., Miguel A., and Miguel A. report similar experiences of opportunity). Parents were equally concerned about protecting their child(ren) from any potential loss of opportunity. This concern was observed with Fred D. when he was placed in a reading level which his mother believed to be inappropriate. She objected to the assignment, and succeeded in removing Fred from the lower reading track. Fred's mother, just as observed with the parents of other persisters, protected him from a "trap" which Ogbu addresses. According to John Ogbu (1978, p. 140), tracking students usually results in a curriculum structured to confirm a student's slowness. This approach will maintain the student's slow or inferior status assuring limited achievement and motivation.

I believe that the examples reviewed in this summary, and discussed in detail earlier in this chapter, are compelling and

convincing proof that the study participants were not simply retrofitting positive statements to parents, but accurately crediting them.

The success of the persisters introduced to you in chapters IV and V, I believe, was less programmatic than individual. They entered the university with the desire, motivation and determination to succeed. The desire to achieve was very clear from the outset for all of the participants. Their parents, neighbors, elementary teachers, and community leaders understood the importance of determination in achieving the goal of degree completion, and made sure the persisters valued that as an outcome. Student aspiration at the time they enter college is a positive indicator of persistence (Astin, 1985 p96).

The participants employed every ounce of creative energy into avoiding the barriers to degree completion which seemed to confront some of them, almost on a daily basis. They were able to create their own support systems, in some instances they were able to prevent the colleges interest in lending a helping hand, from interfering with their determination to succeed.

As previously reported from the transcribed words of the study participants, there were many negative side effects experienced by these participants as a result of attending institutions in which the student body is predominantly white. There is evidence suggesting that African American students experience a great deal of social isolation, alienation, personal dissatisfaction, and overt racism (Smith, 1980; Astin, 1985; Ogbu, 1978; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1991; Bayer, 1991; Weis & Fine, 1993; Mincy, R. B., 1994). In spite of what was reported, and what appeared to be insurmountable odds, the study

participants were truly successful which said as much, or more, about the failures of higher learning's support systems and faculty/student discouragement than the true talents of the persisters.

Although the interaction amongst individuals from different racial and ethnic groups, backgrounds, and experiences may provide many barriers and challenges, the potential for accompanying growth, I believe, is always present. It was that opportunity for growth that the study participants were able to rely on and find the inner strength to succeed.

Discouragement was observed in a variety of ways and in different parts of the institution. The persisters were not readily prepared to accept their experiences of discouragement as unusual and unplanned, they clearly conveyed discomfort and expressed feelings of being singled out for embarrassment and ignored during formal and informal class discussions. Sean P. expressed his disapproval of a classmate's generalization, characterizing men in Harlem as treacherous, which he viewed as negative and was allowed to go unchallenged by the instructor. This was clearly a concern that a generalization which was viewed by this participant as negative and perpetuation of stereotypical thinking, characterizing an entire group of individuals as demonstrating behavior which was considered treacherous could be permitted without anyone in the classroom expressing concern.

Richard S. shared his feelings of not belonging due to classroom discouragement from classmates and instructor's behavior, which in his opinion conveyed the message that what he was attempting to say was not worthy. We also heard from Mike O, John J, Edwin P, Ron D, and others. However, all participants did not succumb to discouragement



and withdraw from classroom participation, four participants insisted on being heard in the classroom. Nick M, one of the four students, told us that he persisted in the classroom and was eventually heard. His persistence ultimately resulted in strong ties with two members of the faculty. Nick, who used determination and persistence accelerated the process of figuring out what his instructors wanted and how to give it to them. What he was really saying was that he learned the rules of engagement and how to cite sources to support his position and provide examples based on personal observation, experience and/or the experience of others to enhance understanding of his position.

Nick M. was admitted to college as a member of a special program (the Urban Education Program) designed to "assist minority high school students that experienced academic and financial" difficulties; at the end of his second year in college he had a 3.3 GPA on a 4.0 system, offering some evidence that he was able to gain some limited advantage over the less hardy study participants. Other study participants mentioned problems with grades the first and second year, perhaps, due to their personal decision not to aggressively participate in certain classroom discussions. Although I believe the students that decided to withdraw--eighty-one percent of those in the study--from classroom participation delayed valuable learning which was needed to underpin their success, I found little to substantiate my feelings, since they were able to achieve their objective of degree completion. Since all of these participants are considered to be successful, in as much as they completed the requirements for the degree, their grades did not truly reflect their abilities.

In analyzing these data, I observed a phenomenon occurring which appeared to be a technique parents used to coach their child(ren) in the art of identifying and managing adversity and danger. The approach, I believe, is unique to African Americans. Contrary to the popular literature which suggests that an American cultural theme of individual achievement is basically the same strategy used by majority families, I found that a great deal of coaching emphasis centered on group status and history of struggle, coupled with parent advocacy and socialization, enrichment opportunities, social exposures, groundwork for succeeding in an unfriendly environment, and constant encouragement; but also, an unusual degree of adversity coaching for esteem and confidence and identity required and available later in life in a person's individual strategy choices. I do not believe that most European-Americans provide this type of coaching for their children: they expect "their" institutions to take care of facilitating it! My thesis, I believe, is supported by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991 p. 24) based on their finding that, until recently, educational researchers based their research on a belief that the "processes of identity development among Blacks and other nonwhite students..." were essentially the same as those for whites. The differences found in identity development with these study participants was important to their survival.

Improving the success rate of African American male college students will require additional research focusing on the identification of factors which contribute to college "retention efforts. Cross's (1971 pp. 100-107) model of Black identity development formation is helpful in understanding some of the

important differences between development in college going African American males and their white classmates (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 34). Research may benefit from his theory on development in this important effort of reducing the attrition rate of African American male college students.

The narratives not only revealed that the participants used coaching learned at an early age to succeed in college, it was also a technique which would prove to be a source of guidance in identifying and avoiding harm while attending college. First we notice that the early experience, in many respects, was more than motivation - it was more of a galvanizing force (shocked into action). Preparing these persisters for unforeseen barriers and obstacles was as important to parents as preparation to make the grade. Parents, intuitively and through their personal experience of growing up black, knew that their children would be confronted with discouragement and hostility. Several examples were offered earlier supporting this idea of parental coaching for avoiding harm and succeeding, but it is best expressed in the following two statements repeated at this point: from John J., we discovered that he was

"taught to respect people in positions of authority but not to believe that white people were interested in his success, at least not as they expected it for white males". (He continued with the following comment) "You understand, our parents...taught us to appear interested but block-out the words. Black people have seen too much suffering and struggling by placing a great deal of confidence in the advice of whites".

Mike O. shared instructive remarks based on his experience when he states that "Black parents should teach their children, starting at a very young age, to never let white people rob their child of his self-confidence."



They succeeded in the face of many barriers due in large part to their positive Self-concept and strong self-identity. It has been well established that a student's self-concept represents an important indicator of undergraduate grade point average. These African Americans men, believing that they possessed the academic ability to succeed displayed a positive indicator of success. The desire to satisfy parents and the lasting affect of parental teachings was something that carried over into college, particularly in terms of getting those men that strayed from their goal, back on the "road" to degree completion (Astin, 1982 p 91 & 96).

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISCUSSION

#### What was Learned?

The following discussion centers around the road to success, which consists of three discussion areas of significance as determined from the analysis of the data: the first will focus on factors persisters reported as inhibiting their efforts to persist; the second will focus on factors perceived to be enabling and supportive in their efforts to persist; then the focus will turn to those factors perceived to be essential in contributing to the persisters success. A discussion of future direction, recommendations, and closing comments will follow.

#### Inhibiting Factors

Fleming (1984, p 9) found that African American male college students experienced considerable academic demotivation, developed feelings that they were not treated fairly, and became unhappy and withdrawn. From the data, I concluded that study participants' negative classroom experience, particularly treatment received at the hands of faculty, represented the most significant barrier to their success.

The participants had high expectations of college but became disillusioned with actual people encountered. Disillusionment was particularly evident in the classroom. They reported experiences of being the target of harmful acts almost as soon as they entered the

classroom. Fourteen of the sixteen study participants experienced harmful acts directed at them during their freshman year. They reported that they entered a hostile environment where its members had little knowledge of their history and life experience. These seventeen, eighteen and nineteen year old young adults looked to the faculty for approval, acceptance and confirmation of their ability to compete at the college level. Instead, they perceived an unwillingness to be engaged, insensitivity to their presence, humiliation, rejection, and suspicion when they performed at a level equal to or above their white classmates. The cumulative affect served to confirm their belief that they were not welcome.

A student's relationship to the faculty may determine his/her level of social integration into the university. The degree to which faculty impart to a student the feeling of acceptance, support, and encouragement will determine, to some extent, that student's feeling of belonging. Tinto (1993) has shown that informal contacts between faculty and freshmen students help predict college persistence

Faculty-student relationships may be especially significant for minority students, especially African Americans, because most faculty teaching in institutions where the student body is predominantly white are white males from class backgrounds different from those of many African American students (Pascarella and Terenzini, pp. 540-552). The following comment by John J. represents his response to a white instructor's conversation with a white male student concerning his red hair and the hair color of the student's father. He stated that,

...teachers of any race or cultural background should speak to all students...about things that are happening within the classroom. Outside of that realm [classroom discussions], especially when the experiences of students are so different, I



really couldn't deal with [a classroom discussion about a student and his father's red hair] it. Obviously the teachers felt more comfortable speaking with students who had something in common with their experience of growing up, what they did as kids, where did daddy go to college, and other things such as that. Personally, I felt locked out of those conversations.

The study participants clearly recognized the problems they encountered by college administrators accusing them of efforts to lock out non-African American members of the campus community as reported; by John A. in his effort to organize predominantly African American fraternities and sororities, and Marion P's comments around African American students eating lunch in one area of the cafeteria. John J. was addressing a form of "insiderness" that he was categorically excluded from - an activity which may have been an instance of a sort of intimacy-building based on "inaccessible" criteria of membership which represents just the sort of thing that makes college a place catering to white males.

Although classroom disillusionment was the most significant factor participants reported, an important emphasis was also placed on the need to become a part of other campus communities. They were either rejected or did not believe that an opportunity existed to become a part of the classroom and other campus communities. The feeling of not belonging, experienced by participants was reported and observed as felt rejection, social and academic estrangement resulting from treatment based on their dark skin and to some extent, their gender. According to Elam (1989, p 33), social estrangement has as much to do with the drop out rate of African Americans as academic deficiencies. The importance of gender in the treatment received by these males can not be overlooked or minimized. It was considered to be a major factor by all of the study participants. Sean told us of

the reaction he received from "whites when they see a big black male." He described this reaction as one of "fear" when his roommate walked into the dormitory room and discovered that he was Black.

These men were not readily, or often discouraged. They were accepted by most of their white faculty and classmates. Some historical evidence is found in the literature, confirming the endurance of the experience and anticipation of rejection and barriers encountered on traditionally white college/university campuses by African American males. The following was reported by W.E.B. DuBois, (1968, p 134 & 283) in discussing his social experience while at Harvard tells us that:

Of course I wanted friends, but I could not seek them. My class was large, with some 300 students. I doubt if I knew a dozen of them. I did not seek them and naturally they did not seek me. I did not seek them... I did not try to accomplish this. This was partly because of my fear that color caste would interfere with our meeting and understanding.

The desire of these persists to establish a positive supportive relationship with faculty, especially white male faculty and classmates, was perceived as being discouraged before most had completed their first year of college. This early discouragement forced the participants to formulate alternate strategies for their survival.

### Positive Factors

Gurin and Epps (1975, p 75) concluded that, "Blacks who perceived discriminating obstacles and placed blame for problems on the system barriers (rather than attributing lack of success to their own personal inadequacies) tended to be more motivated and realistic than those who categorically denied the existence of racial

discrimination as a personal problem". From the data, I concluded that study participants' internal fortitude and self confidence, particularly in their early recognition and response to intentional and unintentional harm, represented the most significant positive attribute contributing to their success.

The study findings revealed and validated participants' positive experiences, particularly positive outcomes, to their internal fortitude and self confidence. What accounted for the success of these African American males in their persistence to degree completion was found in their:

- 1) ability to control the outcome of interactions with faculty and other students.
- 2) early recognition and response to intentional and unintentional harm.
- 3) ability to identify and develop beneficial strategies.
- 4) recognition of services, opportunities and forms of acknowledgment unavailable to them.
- 5) ability to bring about positive outcomes as conditions which they were able to perceive as enabling, supportive, and stable.
- 6) use of adversity coaching received from family at an early age.

Although many examples are provided in chapters iv and v detailing how each of the above impacted the success of study participants, leadership was used most often in addressing a perceived problem. Leadership was one of the more significant strategies employed by these persisters in achieving recognition and restoring self-value. They did not assume leadership positions due to personal interest, it was a way to cope with problems of discouragement. In examining the attitude of these participants toward leadership



qualities they displayed, positions of leadership they held, and the influence they exercised, I discovered that most did not identify themselves as leaders. Instead, they viewed leadership functions as something that had to be done to help them and other African Americans "survive the (college) experience." Positions of leadership and influence was clearly a way that these men gained recognition, status and a voice that was heard, all of the things they were denied in the classroom. Norman B. recognized the importance of involvement in campus activities as a way to strengthen the efforts of African American students as evidenced in the following statement:

...now the few of us (African American students) who were there, I must say that we were actively involved in campus life - I don't want to convey the impression that we excluded ourselves from participation in campus activities - because being there it was important for us to be involved in campus activities, so we were actively involved. I think that student study and social groups are important, but you need to influence campus decisions. I think that is also an important part of persistence and it served as an important support for in us in our effort to persist.

Other positive factors found included the attitude these persisters developed, during their early childhood, concerning college completion. The majority of the participants considered college as a given, a necessity, and important for all the following reasons:

- 1) economic reasons - a way out of poverty (hard work is the way a eleven participants described it), and for three, a way to maintain a lifestyle that they had experienced as children and youth.
- 2) they did not want to disappoint their families.
- 3) it was simply the thing that you had do after high school.
- 4) it was something that they always (not knowing when and how they came upon the idea) expected to do - everyone knew they would go and they certainly expected to go.

- 5) they, from a very early age, had high expectations and self esteem in large part because they had always assumed that they were very intelligent.

Finally, much pressure was placed on many of these degree completers by other African American students as observed in the case of Alonzo C., Edwin P., Tony W., Lacy J., and John J. Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu, 1986, 18 (3), p 181).

#### Factors Contributing to Success

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) found that a strong "black" self-identity or what they refer to as "fictive kinship", is vital to succeeding. From the data, I concluded that study participants' self-confidence, self-esteem and self-identity contained a reservoir of past experience and practices/coaching they could draw on to go out and find the help they would need to get through the gauntlet college often presents -- it was reflected in their resourcefulness.

Many lessons were learned in the family during the participants' early formative years. They learned of their value, their importance, and the need to succeed. They believed that family, friends, and their peers counted on them to succeed, to complete the college program; it was in the family that the journey started. It was their families that introduced them to the idea of college; and, it was their families that initiated the development of sustaining strengths they would need to overcome the negative acts of others intended to discourage. It was important that they have an abundance of positive past experiences and learning to pull from in order to overcome their own actions, as well as to make progress in the face of perceived barriers based on their perception of race inequality.

What accounted for the success of these African American males in developing successful strategies for overcoming barriers and challenges can be found in their personal stories of loving and nurturing parents, concerned neighbors and attentive elementary school personnel, and competitive peers. The experiences most frequently reported as significant in building strong character and a positive self image usually involved all of the community members mentioned above, but they most frequently identified their parent(s). Their sense of self-value, self-worth, self-confidence, and self-identity was most often mentioned in connection with their parent(s) and family.

From the analysis, it was observed that education was valued from a very young age; from a very young age the family instilled an expectation of achievement in these persisters; through supporting the development of a positive self-concept and self-identity, parents and family instilled mechanisms which allowed these individuals to protect their self-esteem. This process was accomplished through coaching. It was observed that parents and family members created opportunities to coach their sons.

Moral and ethical foundations taught by parents were observed throughout the transcripts. Ten of the sixteen participants included in this sample reported that their belief in a God or a superior power provided them with the internal strength to succeed in degree completion. Fifteen of the sixteen reported regular church attendance until their sophomore or junior year in high school. The participants gave a number of specific examples detailing how their early religious teachings benefited them in college. The examples included how religious



teachings: enhanced his social life; offered strength to overcome racism; and for another, assisting in turning his grades around.

These persisters reported that they believed the devaluing of any contribution made or attempted by them was due entirely to their dark skin. By the time they entered college they were prepared to deal with attempts to cause self-doubt, diminish self-esteem, and weaken their self-confidence. Members of the study sample were able to find ways to right themselves and find the road leading to their destination after facing temporary set backs. Their self-identity, self-esteem and confidence was supported from a very broad base which was grounded in a range of relationships with family and friends, providing them with a sense of "community" helping with interpreting reasons for failure and recovering from externally imposed attempts to damage their self-esteem (Graham 1986).

As an insider, I feel compelled to share one of my experiences with my son's high school Latin teacher. His grades on exams and reports (written and oral) were consistently awarded a grade of A. However, at an open house for parents and teachers, she reported that my son was "not performing well in her class and maybe he should not take another semester of Latin." After reminding her that he had no grades below an A, we questioned her as to her requirements and where did he fall short. We were told that he could do the written work, earning the highest grades in the class, but he would never "volunteer to talk or leap in on conversations unless requested to do so." As parents, we of course complained that this form of discouragement was targeted and had its origin in a teacher's perception of what courses African Americans should pursue and how they should behave. Since my

son was an honor student, and had a history of excelling in school (including her class), the superintendent and principal had little difficulty supporting our claim of "possible discouragement, but not for a student as bright as Warren"; they refused to acknowledge that her response to our son was race-based, stating that "she was only encouraging Warren to work at his full potential." Warren continued with Latin for two additional years, maintaining grades of A for the entire time. After his first semester of Latin, he enrolled in a section with a different teacher and was requested to serve as her lab assistant; for the next year and one-half (1 1/2) he held that position. He often commented that the negative experience was useful during his persistence to degree completion at Hamilton College.

#### Future Directions

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore issues relating to persistence in college degree completion rates for African American male graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities. It was a glimpse into the life experiences of sixteen (16) African American male graduates of traditionally white colleges and universities. Although this study was descriptive and exploratory, implications exist for those individuals interested in the practice, implementation, policy formulation, and further study of the retention of African American males. The study's specific focus was to explore the relationship between the success of the participants, and those factors that influenced their decisions to identify, define, use and/or exclude university and community resources in persisting to degree completion.

Although this inquiry is only intended to be a beginning, hopefully it will serve to provide future guidance in addressing two areas which should be of major concern to higher education: first, what types of assistance, programs and services are needed to aid African American males in persisting to degree completion?; and, second, are existing "retention" programs and "retention" efforts designed to "retain" African American male students, or are they shielding the university from charges of failing these students?

Tinto's research on student attrition, particularly the theory he posited on student leave-taking is well respected and frequently cited by higher education researchers. The respect for his formula describing student participation and departure is not only one of the more cited models found in the literature, but he convincingly argues that student departure has more to do with the voluntary nature of leaving than failure to meet academic standards (1993, p. 87). Underprepared students who have been filled with a sense of self appreciation, opportunity, vision, family and community support and encouragement are likely to succeed as observed in the case of Nick M., Richard S., and Steven R.

According to Steele (1992, p. 72), "doing well in school requires a belief that school achievement can be a promising basis of self-esteem, and that belief needs constant reaffirmation even for advantaged students." This requirement was not readily available from college faculty, as reported in chapters four and five, for these study participants. They were frequently signaled or received metamessages that made them feel uneasy, metamessages that made them feel unwelcomed. These metamessages are relationship messages that



pass between people as they interact (Satir, 1967; Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967). Metamessages are transmitted and received verbally and nonverbal, consciously and unconsciously. These messages may convey admiration, appreciation, joy, ridicule, scorn, or disgust. Metamessages can be described within the context of the presuppositions faculty, students, retention practitioners, and administrators communicate based on their theoretical framework (Walter and Pellar, 1992). For example, a metamessage influenced in the tradition of psychological models maybe communicated as though the student is the problem; something within the student isn't developed or is defective, and that something should be developed or fixed if the student is to succeed.

I suppose it is reasonable to anticipate concern that persistence to degree completion may represent a view of over reliance on psychological models which explain and identify attributes allowing for college success. Of course this approach, due primarily to construct, would place failure squarely on the shoulders of the non-persisters; relieving the institution from any responsibility of failure. Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (1993), tell us that minority students are disabled by schools in a similar fashion to the way their communities are disempowered by interactions with societal institutions. Since equality of opportunity is believed to be a given, it is assumed that individuals are responsible for their own failure and are, therefore, made to feel that they have failed because of their own inferiority, despite the best efforts of dominant-group institutions and individuals assigned to help them.

Since psychological models are primarily interested in the deficiencies of the individual, one significant short coming is the absence of research for stakeholders (policy makers, administrators, retention professionals/practitioners, students and parents) to rely on for system changes; or more problematic, realize that the system is flawed. Tinto (1993, p 85) argues that, although there is some truth in the psychological view it is not complete. As discussed in chapter two, Tinto persuasively advances the notion of the environment, and more specifically the context within that environment students find themselves in as a useful inquiry for policy influence; ultimately improving and strengthening efforts to retain students (1993, p 87).

Existing literature, particularly that literature focusing on the inadequacy and failures of African American college "drop outs", tends to treat the deficiencies of some as though they were representative of the entire group, thus further marginalizing the population as a whole. The practice of over-generalization often results in obviating an important majority of successful African American male degree completers. The literature has in fact silenced the voices of many successful African American males regarding their experiences of higher education. This study, through qualitative inquiry grounded in personal narratives of successful African American males, sought to contribute to new and emerging research efforts that would break those silences.

The profiles in this inquiry, I believe, represent the most cogent and sustained narratives of the persisters voices that I was able to find in the persistence literature; particularly that literature on minorities in general and African American males

specifically. Their stories of persistence offer knowledge and understanding which, irrespective of our interpretations, bring us closer to a more in-depth awareness of the African American male's experience of degree completion on a traditionally white college campus. It is a beginning, a beginning to know what it is really like to be Black and a male on a college/university campus where the student body was predominantly white.

Although African American male attrition in higher education has given rise to a significant body of literature about the "problem of retention", a thorough search of the literature revealed limited explanatory literature dealing with African American male degree completion on the campuses of predominantly white colleges and universities. The experiences of the participants, as reported in the profiles and in the thematic data, reveal that the experiences of African American male degree completers are far more complex than the available research conveys.

The existing literature tended to focus on limited aspects of African American persistence and degree completion, emphasizing deficiencies, dropout behavior, and level of involvement in the academic and social activities of the African American college dropout. In general there is a paucity of literature suggesting ways to help students persist to degree completion, or retain students in college until degree completion. Although not seen in many of the other research studies on persistence, this inquiry found such factors as; early family influence and involvement, exposure to religious activities and programs, some awareness of the experience of African Americans in the U.S., adversity coaching, faculty interaction, and



campus leadership to be very important and significant in understanding persistence in college degree completion for African American males.

### Recommendations

This researcher is of the opinion that the study effectively accomplished the three modest interrelated goals stated in chapter one:

- 1) the first was to identify self-reported factors which were experienced as barriers in the success of African American male college graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities.
- 2) the second was to discover the conditions, programs and resources African American males self report as significant positive factors that influenced their persistence to degree completion.
- 3) the third was to gain an in-depth understanding of their overall college experience, in order to determine to what extent African American males are able to make progress in the face of perceived barriers based on their perception of race based inequality.

Due to the many unanswered questions, particularly concerning non persisters -- excluded from this research study, additional important issues must be investigated. Thus, the following are but a few recommendations for further research that have evolved over the course of this study:

- 1) Further research is needed to determine what goes into adversity coaching in preparation of African American males for later participation in education. It would be of interest to compare the experience of white males with that of African American males.
- 2) A replication of this study to confirm the findings. A replication study should include African American male graduates of historically Black colleges.

- 3) Further research is needed designed to investigate those qualities sought in faculty members by African American males (since these study participants identified white and black faculty as helpful, I would not consider the qualities as being unique to race.
- 4) Since these young men, still adolescents, informally searched for male faculty advisors, but often found white and black female faculty advisors to be "concerned", a follow-up study identifying qualities female faculty advisors possess that African American males find to be helpful.
- 5) A follow-up study with two groups of successful African American male graduates of traditionally white colleges. One group should consist of graduates recruited and serviced by special support/retention programs, and the other group admitted through regular admissions process. The study should attempt to determine to what extent the early experiences of the two groups are similar.
- 6) A follow-up study is needed to identify those positive qualities possessed by white male faculty as identified by African American male college graduates and students.

#### Closing Comments

Universities quite honestly have postulated that the basic problem in higher education vis-a-vis Black people is simply that the universities need to open the door to more Black students through more flexible admissions policies, increased financial aid, and more active recruiting in the ghettos. The basic assumption is almost always that Blacks must be provided more opportunity to participate in the university experience, that is, to enjoy the same rights as any white student. What the universities have failed to realize in almost every case is that the American educational experience is a white experience, an experience based on white history, white tradition, white culture, white customs, and white thinking, an education designed primarily to produce a culturally sophisticated, middle-class, white American. What is required, consequently, of any Black who comes through the system is that he become white, that he become assimilated.

D. Nichols & O. Mills (1970, p 98)

The academic and social problems confronting African American male students are often exacerbated by the attitudes and practices of

educators, which often suggest a lack of sensitivity or understanding of the groups culture and the dynamics of male development.

The success of these persisters in this study, I believe, were less programmatic than individual. They entered the university with the desire, motivation and determination to succeed and, as we learned, they employed every ounce of creative energy into avoiding the barriers to degree completion which seemed to confront some of them, almost on a daily basis. They were able to create their own support systems, in some instances they were able to prevent the colleges interest in lending a helping hand from interfering with their determination to succeed.

Although this study did not investigate the phenomenon of failure, I believe that we gained sufficient knowledge of the struggle against failure to consider the notion that social estrangement has as much to do with the drop out rate of African Americans as academic deficiencies (Elam 1989 p. 33). We discovered the importance the study participants placed on the need to become a part of the campus community. They were either rejected or did not believe that an opportunity existed in their effort to become a part of the classroom community. Several of their experiences of unsuccessful attempts to become a part of that community was offered as proof of the challenges confronted by them.

Much of what we have discovered reveals that college and university programs designed to assist African American males complete degree programs brings about an uneasiness amongst them, a feeling that something sets them apart from others. They question whether this special attention will harm rather than help degree completion.



The perceived deficiencies of African American college dropouts will continue to appear legitimate until this uneasiness is understood. In other words, a way must be found to shift the focus from the symptoms of dropouts to the reality of their experience (Ogbu 1991).

College and university support programs ("retention" programs) are usually given credit for the success of African American degree completion and absolved of any responsibility for the failures of their participants. Just as admissions professionals claim a certain professional expertise in predicting potential success of applicants, "retention" professionals should be held to a similar standard. That is to say they should be able to predict, with a certain level of accuracy, the potential for success of those students that they claim to possess expertise in helping. It is equally important that they are able to articulate attributes that they look for in determining potential for success as a result of a student's exposure to retention services. Tinto (1993, p 145) tells us that "what works in retaining students ... resides ... in the answer to the more important question of why particular forms of institutional action are successful in retaining students."

It is not enough to say that the potential exist for all African American males to compete at the college level without being able to identify, on an individual basis, needs and how those needs will be met. From the personal histories of successful African American degree completers we may be able to begin to understand what a persistence model might include. I believe that it is with increased understanding of successful African American male persisters that we will be able to create opportunities with the very highest potential

of succeeding in assisting those students experiencing difficulty. Until we inform our understanding of the experiences of the successful African American male degree completers, we risk developing new, and continuing old programs founded on the erroneous notion of sameness. Thus, marginalizing the entire group and continuing the practice of placing the blame at the feet of unsuccessful students. I believe that we invest a disproportionate amount of our resources attempting to show the efficacy of what retention programs do, often, at the expense of depreciating, and in certain instances omitting the value of attributes African Americans come to college with.

The following statement is repeated from page sixteen of this study as a reminder to those doubters amongst us troubled by a persistence paradigm. A paradigm valuing the strengths, resulting from a history of lived experience and that oral and written history of the experiences of African American college students' family and ancestors. Existing programmatic efforts founded on half truths often overlook the strengths of participants and continue to disable these young men.

It has been demonstrated that African Americans have the native ability to succeed and excel in educational pursuits in the face of overwhelming adversity. No period in our history can be more telling of this fact than the educational progress made by Africans while enslaved and forbidden to educate themselves. Today, we find educational attainment by an entire population that cuts across class and social boundaries. This success, I believe, is too commonplace for debate on the capability of African Americans to achieve in degree completion, at least, in comparable numbers to the larger population.

This, of course, is not to deny that many of these students put themselves at risk of premature or early withdrawal from college. Perhaps we can benefit from their knowledge.

This study reported the results that tests the premise that African-American male completers view both the ideology and practices of retention as part of the complex of forces against which they perceive themselves to be struggling. The narratives of these African-American male completers do in fact support this premise, but also suggest the messages these programs communicate to the larger society diminishes the credibility of the credentials they earned. The results of this study suggest the need for further research in this area, and they alert us to the broad consequences of programs grounded in generalizations about the members of various populations.

The various practices that constitute the business end of retention programs are well institutionalized within higher education. The fundamental assumption underlying many of these programs has also been institutionalized. That assumption is that the members of certain populations are socially, culturally or educationally deficient; that they lack the emotional, social or educational skills to compete in academia without special supports. While we are accustomed to viewing retention programs as efforts to ensure the success of African-American males, we may overlook the fact that what these programs communicate about African-American males is part of the structure of higher education that they must struggle against. Institutionalized retention efforts may be one of the specific structures against which African-American college students struggle. We must find an approach to the critique of the ideology and practice



of retention. This study, in many respects, sought to sketch an approach to the critique of the ideology and practice of retention. That approach is grounded in the experience of those African-American males who struggled in and against higher education, those who persisted and met their educational goals.

Over the past thirty years we have observed oppressed and marginalized groups, whose experiences have been described, defined, and categorized by powerful experts, rise up to tell their own stories and to define themselves through this process, perhaps more of an insurrection, they have empowered themselves and their own truths and knowledge have begun to be validated and legitimized. What does this mean for those that see the business of retaining, teaching, counseling, and administering services as including and benefiting all under-represented students in general and African American and Puerto Rican American males specifically? How can their efforts be used to support the empowerment of marginalized student populations?

It would appear that an initial effort would be to abandon the notion that our classrooms and faculty, residence halls and student bodies, retention programs and staffs, college/university support offices and administrators are objective race-neutral enablers who strive to create and maintain a receptive and friendly environment. Retention, administrators, researchers, and practitioners must discontinue the practice of appropriating those they would try to know and understand by "colonizing their experiences, by interpreting them from the perspective of the privileged expert" (Opie, 1992). An effort must be made to enter into a collaborative search for meaning

with minority students in general and African American males in particular and listen to their voices, their narratives, and their constructions of reality.

APPENDIX A  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am Robert White, a graduate student at the School of Education, University of Mass at Amherst (UMass). The subject of inquiry in my study is to explore factors that influence African American male college graduates to persist to degree completion and I will examine the role retention programs played in degree completion.

You are being asked to be a participant in this study. My interview with you will be at a time and location which is convenient for you. The interview will be audio-taped, then, the recorded interview will be transcribed. My goal is to analyze and compose the material gathered in this study for my dissertation research.

The transcript will be disseminated in the form of a presentation in the oral examination of my dissertation as needed. A broader circulation of the transcript might be expected in the course of my academic career when I use the material for academic purposes.

As an interviewer in this study, I acknowledge my responsibility to protect your dignity and privacy. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcript for all persons and locations that may reveal your identity. The transcript will remain in my direct physical possession. All audio-tapes of your interview will be locked up with my personal, confidential documents. Once the study is completed, a summary of the presentation will be mailed to you at your request.



I acknowledge that, after you have given your consent to be interviewed, you have the right to withdraw from the actual process at any time. No questions will be asked.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated above.

_____	_____
(Signature of participant)	(Date)

_____	_____
(Signature of interviewer)	(Date)

## APPENDIX B

### PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted to test the persister interview questions, to confirm and develop my ability to take field observation notes, and to establish reliability for the approach and conduct of the interview.

#### Interview Questions:

The interview questions were piloted with individuals that I had previous contact with and could anticipate immediate, direct and candid feedback. The interviews were based on and comprised of questions consistent with Seidman's model of in-depth interviewing. The interviews were tape recorded. One member of my Committee with experience and expertise in interviewing read one transcribed interview and provided critical feedback concerning my use of interviewing skills and the appropriateness of the questions employed (the two remaining interviews from my pilot will be submitted to him for additional feedback). Based on his initial review I was advised to proceed with the interviews.

#### Field Notes:

During my initial conversations with the pilot interviewees, I watched the response/reactions to my style, voice inflection, and interview participation behaviors exhibited by the interviewees.

My field notes also included a description of the physical surroundings, interview procedures, and behaviors of interviewer and interviewee.

The following individuals participated in the pilot:

Tony #1 - from a working class African American neighborhood who grew up in the Bronx. He is employed by the Supreme Court of N. Y. State, 2nd Administrative Office - his office is in NYC - He is responsible for following up on court decisions to determine if jurisdictions are complying.

Norman # 2 - from a working class African American neighborhood who grew up on the South Side of Chicago. He is employed as acting Director of Multi culturalism at a university in the UMass system.

Mark # 3 - from a working class African American neighborhood who grew up in the Bronx. He is employed by a non-profit criminal justice agency in NYC. Serves as an advocate for pre-sentence felons. He is also an assistant minister in his fathers church - a church that his father founded and currently claims over 5,000 members.

The following is a brief overview of the participants.

#### **Home Town, State and College of the Participants**

<u>City/State</u>	<u>Undergraduate College</u>	<u>Date Enrolled</u>	<u>Date Graduated</u>
Chicago, IL	Lewis University	Sept. 1970	May 1974
NYC, NY	Georgetown University	Sept. 1981	May 1985
NYC, NY	Manhattan Community C.	Sept. 1973	May 1976



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